

# Women's cattle ownership in Botswana

Rebranding gender relations?

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Cover: Newly branded heifer, a gift to the author from a friend in the Kalahari.  
(Photo: Andrea Petitt)

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## Abstract

Cattle are often portrayed as a male affair in Botswana. However, venturing out into the Kalahari countryside to scratch the surface of this state of affairs, another picture emerges. There are in fact many women from different socioeconomic background who own, manage and work with cattle in different ways, and their farming is defined by both the connection to the EU beef market and interlinked local processes of power. Cattle are ever-present in Botswana and play a paramount role in the economy, in politics and in the rural landscape of the country, as well as in many people's cultural identity, kinship relations and everyday routines. I study women's involvement in cattle production in Ghanzi District to think about how peoples' relations to certain livestock species produce, reproduce and challenge established patterns of material and social relations. More specifically I investigate how access and claims to livestock are defined by intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class within broader contexts associated with the commercialisation of livestock production. The objective of this thesis is to explore how different women are able to benefit from their cattle ownership in terms of their social positions and material welfare in Botswana within the broader political, economic and sociocultural contexts associated with the commercial beef industry. Through ethnographic fieldwork and an intersectional analysis of gendered property relations to grazing land and cattle, I show how women do benefit from both subsistence products and monetary income from cattle sales. An increased need for cash together with the possibility to sell cattle stimulated by Botswana's beef trade with the EU have motivated women to seek control over cattle. There are women who, encouraged by gender equality messages from the Ministry of Gender Affairs, make use of the government's loans and grants designed to facilitate entrepreneurship to start up their own cattle operations and make claims to the cattle market. Many of these women, who have control over their cattle also benefit in terms of social status and a number of those women who engage in cattle production in ways seen as new and different speak of more equal gender relations.

*Key words:* gender, women, livestock, cattle, ownership, property, commercialisation, change, intersectionality.

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## List of abbreviations and glossary

AI	Artificial insemination
BMC	Botswana Meat Commission
Bolus	Capsule containing information about the animal, its origin and ownership
Cattle-hand	Employee that looks after cattle
Cattle post	Refers to a cattle operation on non-fenced, communal land, but can also mean the watering point on a fenced farm
Bore hole	A drilled water hole
CEDA	Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency
DGA	Department of Gender Affairs
DVS	Division of Veterinary Services
Heifer	Female cattle who has not yet calved
<i>Kraal</i>	Fenced paddock, usually around a water point, to retain cattle
RAC	Rural Administration Centre
TGLP	Tribal Grazing Land Policy
Tolly	Yearling oxen
<i>Veld</i>	Wide open rural landscape
Wiener	Cattle at the age of weaning, often around 5-6 months
YDF	Youth Development Fund



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# 1 Venturing into gendered cattle country

“Cattle [...] a citadel of male power in Botswana” (Gender researcher, University of Botswana, 2012)

“Now that I have cattle, I am a real woman!” (Woman cattle owner, 22, Metsomantle, 2013)

“Two tooth, eight pula!” From the scales at the front of the line of cattle standing in the handling facilities at the market place, a man shouts the age and price of a male calf. Age is counted in teeth, and the national currency, pula, is named after the rain. Looking beyond the people and animals at the market, it is easy to understand why rain is celebrated. The thorny bushes and the camel thorn trees are crispy dry and across the vast, flat savannah, or *sandveld*, not much else grows in the sand. This land, its cattle and its people are all dependent on the yearly rainy season for their survival, wellbeing and fortune – and the Kalahari climate can be treacherous. This July day in Botswana, in a small village in Ghanzi District, the enclosures, or *kraals*, are filled with cattle. Small clouds of dust rise whenever gates are opened and the cattle moved. The buyer today is a large feedlot company, specialising in fattening calves before selling them for slaughter to the abattoir that has monopoly on beef export. This calf is destined for the European Union. Beside me in a hole in the sand lie some branding irons in a fire built on cow dung. Every time an animal is sold, the brand of the new owner is burnt onto its left hind thigh and a hot whiff of air together with a particular stinging smell floats by. A brand on an animal signals uncontested ownership and control. People are sitting on the fences, watching the cattle and chatting. Some are standing or sitting on the ground around the *kraals*, watching, talking, while others are walking around selling candy. Horses, some with nice-looking saddles, are tied to bushes here and there, some lying down occasionally. There are many women among the crowd, speaking various languages and some wearing clothes associated with different ethnic groups. Chatting to some of them, I learn that they are here to sell their cattle.

The number of women present at the market to sell *their* cattle surprised me at first. My understanding had been that cattle – symbolising social status and yielding political and economic power – was a male affair in Botswana and in the dominant Tswana society. Yet the women had their registered brand certificates to prove that the cattle were theirs to sell. Although women all around Africa are engaged in a number of cattle-related tasks, control over the animals in those settings where there is an increased focus on commercial production is often limited (Dahl 1987, Talle 1988, Curry 1996, Hodgson 1999b, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b). Reading the literature, Botswana does not seem to be an exception, as the men have for a long time had control over the country's cattle (Schapera 1938, Peters 1984, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953), Kalabamu 2005, Hovorka 2012).

Before setting out towards Ghanzi to start my major fieldwork season, I met with a former head agricultural economist at the Botswana Ministry of Agriculture. "It's an interesting idea" (field notes 20 April 2013, Oodi), he told me when I presented my PhD project about women's cattle ownership to him, but cautioned that I might have to rethink my focus as I might not find enough women cattle owners "you can't write a thesis with two women [...]" (ibid). This older Setswana-speaking man had received me at his home in a small village outside Gaborone to talk about cattle production in the country, and to organise some test interviews for my potential translators. He could not recall having met women who actively farmed cattle on their own during his time in office.

There are some widows, he explained, who are left with cattle when their husbands die; but otherwise it is the men who farm cattle. As we shall see in chapter 5, this view was repeated in conversations I had with people from different contexts, including employees at the Botswana Ministry of Agriculture, scholars at the University of Botswana and other universities around the world, as well as certain groups of cattle farmers. There was a widespread understanding of cattle production as being virtually an exclusively a male affair, with a few well-established exceptions of women's participation. Yet all around Ghanzi District, I met women from different groups engaged in management of their own cattle herds. Venturing out into the Kalahari countryside to examine at first hand this state of affairs, tension between established ideas and actual practice emerged.

Most of the women attending the market on that July day spoke different Setswana and Sekgalagadi dialects and a few spoke Herero or Nharo. The buyers were men and spoke Afrikaans and English. Some of the women were there to sell their own cattle and some were there to accompany their



husbands who were in charge of the herd. Approximately two-thirds of the people at the market were men.

Interviewing women cattle owners, some of them talked about their role in cattle production as being *because of* them being a woman from a certain culture, or being in a certain economic situation. However, other women talked about their engagement in cattle production as being *in spite of* being a woman from a certain culture, or being in a certain economic situation. Different expectations regarding who relates to cattle and in what way raises questions about what cattle ownership means in terms of property relations for different women and what this in turn means for their abilities to benefit from their cattle. In order to explore how women's social positions – how they negotiate status or sense of worth in relation to other women and men through their involvement in cattle production – we need to take into account how property relations and claims to cattle are constructed and manifested at the intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class that structure life in Botswana. Such intersections are also significant for how cattle ownership influences possibilities of market access and in turn material welfare such as housing, food, schooling, personal transport and even vacations.

## Research Objective and Questions

The objective of this thesis is to explore how different women are able to benefit from cattle ownership in terms of their social positions and material welfare in Botswana within the broader political, economic and socio-cultural contexts associated with the beef industry. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the understanding of how peoples' relations to certain livestock species produce, reproduce and challenge established power relations. This thesis also adds to the discussion on how access and claims to livestock are defined by intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class within broader contexts associated with the commercialisation of livestock production.

Guiding my study are these research questions:

- How do women cattle owners establish their claims to cattle? Do they benefit from their cattle ownership and does the way they benefit vary between women with different social backgrounds and in different situations?
- How do women cattle owners at different intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class experience the impact of commercialisation on their ability to benefit from cattle?

## Exploring the questions

The questions above are situated in the wider field of *rural development*; the studies that conceptualise changes in rural areas. Rural development, can be thought of as economic progress and efforts to improve the lives of people in rural areas, but also as that which people in rural areas themselves do (Arora-Jonsson 2013). Such dynamics are entwined with environmental processes in which access to natural resources become important (ibid), and social relations are created in interaction with our nonhuman surroundings (Nightingale 2006). Rights and responsibilities to the material are also gendered (Moeping 2013, Hovorka 2006, Rocheleau et al. 1996), and land has been central to debates about how gender relations are bound up with property relations to natural resources (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b). Studies on pastoral societies have investigated gender relations and women's roles and rights to livestock and livestock assets (Dahl 1987, Talle 1987, Broch-Due and Hodgson 2000, Hodgson 2000). Research on commercialisation of livestock production has explored what happens to gender relations and women's access to and control over resources when they are commodified (Talle 1988, Hodgson 1999b, Kristjanson et al. 2010, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b).

Literature on women and livestock markets is scarce, as pointed out by Kristjanson et al. (2014) and they indicate that women participate mainly by supplying dairy products. Njuki and Sanginga (2013a) identify the need for ethnographic accounts that specifically examine the implications that women's livestock ownership in Africa has for gender relations, and how they might benefit from particular livestock species. In addition, Hovorka (2015) calls for research on agricultural subsectors where women might not predominate but do participate, such as beef cattle and large scale production.

I explore how women with different social backgrounds and in different situations who own cattle in a setting of commercialised beef production have varying property relations to their animals and face diverse opportunities and challenges to benefit from cattle ownership. Moreover, this research continues the scholarly investigation of what happens to gender relations and women's status in societies that have been centred around cattle, when animals are increasingly raised to be sold, focusing on women who actually do own cattle.

### **Thinking with women and cattle in Ghanzi**

I aim to answer the research questions stated above by exploring the various property relations and access to cattle assets that women cattle owners have at distinct intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class. This means

taking into account the different opportunities and challenges faced, for example, by an older widowed Motswana<sup>1</sup> woman who owns a few cattle on non-fenced communal grazing land or a middle-aged married Afrikaner woman who has a large, fenced, freehold farm.

In a time when efforts are being made by the Botswana government to intensify commercial cattle production, at the same time as it is trying to promote gender equality and women's entrepreneurship, this thesis explores women's claims and rights to cattle and what this means for gender relations. I describe and analyse women's involvement in cattle farming in Ghanzi District, Botswana, with a focus on how gender relations are both constructed and articulated by the ways that men and women relate to cattle. With all the changes made in the past decades, it is of interest to examine how women's cattle ownership fits into the recurring larger story of how commercialisation undermines both women's control over livestock assets as well as their position in society.

After a nine-month ethnographic field study in Ghanzi District, Botswana, based on participant observation and interviews (discussed further in chapter 3), I used a thematic analysis to interpret my data. Through an intersectional analysis of property relations linked to women's cattle ownership I explored themes related to gender and commercialisation. My findings suggest that women's involvement in cattle production takes diverse forms in Botswana, and that women benefit differently in terms of material welfare and social status. This thesis is the presentation, discussion and analysis of how and why women in Ghanzi engage in cattle production and benefit from their cattle ownership. Guiding my analysis is a focus on gendered ownership and wider property relations.

## Gender, property and ownership

Social relations, including gender, interact with relations to our nonhuman surroundings, such as nature and animals (Nightingale 2006, Hovorka 2012, Njuki and Sanginga 2013a, Broch-Due and Hodgson 2000, Agarwal 1994a, Agarwal 1994b). Gendered property relations to land, livestock and other resources are important to explore in order to understand how changes in rural areas affect men and women in various ways. In Botswana, research on rural development has often focused on efforts to increase both the welfare and the standard of living for rural populations (Gulbrandsen 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas 'Tswana' commonly refers to an ethnic group composed of subgroups, the prefix 'Mo' refers to a person in singular and 'Ba' to persons in plural and 'Se' refers to the language.

Scholars have analysed how efforts to stimulate economic and social development have focused on changing land policies, increasing productivity, and the commercialisation of cattle (Peters 1984, Perkins 1996, Ransom 2011).

Feminist political ecology approaches have emphasised how environmental resources in Botswana and elsewhere are gendered, and thus how rights to and responsibilities for these resources are also gendered (Moepeng 2013, Hovorka 2006, Rocheleau et al. 1996). Property relations are social relations (Macpherson 1978, Sikor and Lund 2009), and in Botswana property claims, rights and access to cattle have been of the utmost importance for negotiating political and social relations (Schapera 1938, Schapera 1994, Gulbrandsen 2012), not the least for gender relations, where women have been excluded from cattle ownership (Kalabamu 2005). The ability to benefit from property relations is, as suggested by Ribot and Peluso (2003), tied to access to capital, technology, labour, markets, authority and knowledge, through social identity and other social relations. Property is also linked to personhood in that ownership of and access to valued resources can be tied up to a sense of worth and being a 'full person' (Rao 2008).

What cattle ownership actually entails is not a straightforward matter. Njuki and Sanginga (2013b), in their introduction to their edited volume that analyses how gendered livestock ownership benefits women in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, underline the importance of how ownership of different animal species benefits women differently in terms of material resources. Access to livestock assets such as milk and draught power can differ from decision-making power over the animal when it comes to management or sale (ibid.). Bina Agarwal (1994b) argues that the most important thing for equal gender relations is women's relative access to and control over land. She writes about South Asia where land for crop production is of the utmost importance, and also emphasises social acceptance of women's property ownership. Although it is cattle in Botswana, and not land, that constitutes the paramount resource tied to survival, wellbeing, social status, prestige and gender relations (Peters 1984, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Schapera 1994, Gulbrandsen 2012, Hovorka 2012), looking at women's relative control is still relevant for exploring how they might benefit from cattle ownership.

### **Gender, cattle and commercialisation**

At the market described above, the women came *to sell* their cattle. Studies have explored how women lose control, status and control over livestock assets with commercialisation — the introduction of a market economy and

increased focus on sales of the animals. There are many examples of how women's control of livestock has declined when productivity and marketing has increased (Dahl 1987, Talle 1988, Curry 1996, Hodgson 1999b, Sanginga 2013, Kristjanson et al. 2014), and also income from livestock assets (Njuki et al. 2011). Sikana and Kerven (1991) note in their review on the effect of commercialisation on the role of labour in African pastoral societies, that when sales of live animals increase, female labour related to milking is devalued. The development of private property regimes that often follow the commercialisation of agriculture tends to lead to women losing some of the rights they had previously (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003).

Furthermore, property relations to cattle in a commercial setting present distinct opportunities and challenges for women situated differently at various intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class.

### **Intersectionality as a tool**

A focus on intersectionality highlights different ways in which power relations are produced and shape peoples experience at the confluence of different axes (Crenshaw 1989). By looking at how the relations among multiple dimension of social relations between groups of people (McCall 2005) are mediated through property relations to cattle, I show how 'women' cannot be taken as a unified category (Mohanty 1988) even within the same agricultural sub-sector in a specific place.

Cattle have been crucial in the construction of not only Tswana society and ethnicity but also Herero, Bakgalagadi<sup>2</sup> and Afrikaner ethnicity, and historically they have been important in different ways for the Nharo and English native speakers of Ghanzi (Russell 1976, Russell and Russell 1979, Solway 1988, Wilmsen 1989, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953), Schapera 1994, Guenther 2015).

People's relations to cattle are not only tied to gender but also to ethnicity, race and class, and property relations to cattle and grazing land have been integral to shaping such power relations (Kalabamu 2005, Bolt and Hillbom 2013a). In this thesis I show how gender, ethnicity, race and class intersect to create different meanings of women's relations with a valued species within the same broader context of commercialisation of livestock production.

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<sup>2</sup> Whereas 'Kgalagadi' commonly refers to an ethnic group composed of subgroups, the prefix 'Mo' refers to a person in singular and 'Ba' to persons in plural and 'Se' refers to the language.

## Contributions

By looking at how women in different social positions access cattle, grazing land, technology and markets, I show how women's property relations to cattle allow them to benefit from their cattle ownership. I show how access to capital, technology, labour and markets, amongst other things are shaped by intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class in ways that allow different women to benefit in various ways from their cattle in both material and non-material ways. Further, I show how access to capital in the form of money, cattle and grazing land, and access to technology in the form of fences and exotic breeds, is linked to market access and abilities to benefit from commercial beef production.

Investigating the importance of the increased focus on rearing cattle to sell, and women's experiences of gendered change, I seek to contribute to the body of literature that deals (albeit in different ways) with gender in livestock production systems and how it is shaped by commercialisation (Dahl 1987, Curry 1996, Njuki and Sanginga 2013a). Further, I show the importance of being species specific when studying livestock production through a gender lens by pointing towards economic opportunities and social status linked to certain livestock species in a particular setting.

In exploring cattle as a resource to own and control, drawing on Agarwal's (1994b) understanding of relative control over key resources as important for gender relations, and Rao's (2008) way of linking property to social status and personhood, I hope to contribute to the debate about the importance of ownership of valued natural resources, and livestock in particular, for gender relations. Further, I show how rural development, as the way in which people are working to improve their lives in rural areas (Arora-Jonsson 2013), can be driven by individual and uncoordinated women. Exploring how different relations to cattle both as a species and as a material resource are in fact constituted by and for women, I offer an account of how different women use cattle production as a means to produce, reproduce or challenge gendered expectations and opportunities of property relations.

### **Structure of the thesis**

After this introduction, chapter 2 outlines my choice of theoretical tools and conceptual framework. I also discuss the bodies of literature that I draw on and why they were chosen and explain how I conducted an intersectional analysis. In chapter 3 I discuss my methodology and methods, what choices I made in the field and how I analysed the data. Chapter 4 introduces the cattle network of Botswana as defined by its historical property relations to grazing

land and cattle linked to gender, ethnicity, race and class. This chapter also discusses the formal regulations that create the context in which contemporary farmers raise their cattle. In chapter 5 I introduce the different production systems in Ghanzi and show how women are positioned within these systems. I discuss how the women I interviewed are situated differently in terms of property relations and access to grazing land, cattle, technology and the market. Chapter 6 goes on to discuss how women reproducing diverse 'cultural traditions' are associated with certain positions in relation to cattle production. I then explore the relevance of these associations for women's possibilities of control over the cattle they own and for how they benefit from their cattle in terms of personhood. In chapter 7 I go on to discuss the material and non-material benefits available to cattle-owning women, considering their control over cattle as well as their socio-symbolic place in relation to cattle as compared to their actual cattle connections. I explore links between narratives of changing trends of women's involvement in cattle production, government initiatives focusing on commercial production, as well as gender equality. Finally, chapter 8 draws together the analysis from the previous chapters, presenting a concluding discussion and summarising the answers to the research question.





## 2 Theoretical framework and concepts to think with

### Introduction

In order to explore how women benefit from cattle ownership in terms of their social positions and material welfare in Botswana within the broader political, economic and socio-cultural contexts associated with the beef industry, I investigate property relations as mediators of power in social relations (Macpherson 1978, Sikor and Lund 2009). The material basis for people's lives is important for negotiations of gender relations between people (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b, Rocheleau et al. 1996, Agarwal 2003a, Rao 2008) and gendered relations to the non-human environment matter in these negotiations (Nightingale 2003, Rankin 2003, Nightingale 2006, Arora-Jonsson 2009, 2014).

Studying how women's relations to certain livestock species produce, reproduce and challenge established patterns of material and social relations (Hovorka 2006, 2012, Njuki and Sanginga 2013a), I examine how relations to cattle shape gender relations between and among men and women (eg. Hovorka 2006, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b, Hovorka 2015) and are affected by the commercialisation of livestock production (eg. Dahl 1987, Hodgson 2000, Njuki et al. 2011). Exploring the ways in which women with different social backgrounds and in different situations establish their claims to cattle assets and experience the impact of commercialisation on their ability to benefit from cattle ownership, I rely on an intersectional analysis (Mohanty 1988, 2003, McCall 2005, Nightingale 2006, 2011) showing how gendered relations to a specific livestock species are constructed not only

through ethnicity, but also through race and class, and influence property relations throughout developments of rural livestock production.

I hope to contribute to the discussions on rural development by showing how women's different engagements with a certain livestock species allow them to negotiate material welfare and social positions, thus influencing change and ideas about what development means in their rural area. By exploring how both the nature and implications of women's cattle ownership in Botswana are articulated through intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class – within broader political economic and socio-cultural contexts associated with the commercial cattle industry – I engage with literature on gender and property relations through thinking about how gender is co-constructed with our non-human environment, and in particular cattle.

## **Gender and cattle ownership**

Statistics show that there has been no relative decline in women's cattle ownership in Botswana during the past few decades (GoB 2014). However, we do not know what this means in terms of women's possibilities for benefiting from their cattle. I examine how intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class affect how women are able benefit from cattle ownership, whilst relating to literature on women's roles in livestock production. Most research on women's roles and gendered change in livestock production has been framed within research on pastoral societies (Waithanji et al. 2013). As a majority of the women in my sample adhere to groups that have been called pastoral or agro-pastoral societies, this research is relevant. However, I use the terms cattle production or cattle farming to refer to the cattle practices of the cattle owners in Botswana rather than distinguishing between pastoral production and commercial ranching beforehand, as I shall discuss further in chapter 7. I use the term pastoralism when referring to other research that uses the term.

### **Women's cattle ownership**

Many feminist scholars challenge what they perceive as simplistic assumptions concerning the nature of male dominance among pastoral people (Dahl 1987, Talle 1987, Curry 1996, Broch-Due and Hodgson 2000, Hodgson 2000, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b). They criticise earlier gender research among cattle pastoralists for its exaggerated emphasis on the importance of male dominance, and instead focus attention on the complex roles, rights and relations of women in pastoral societies. In the special

issue of *Ethnos*, edited by Dahl (1987), dedicated to ‘Women in Pastoral Production’, the authors challenge what they see as being simplistic ideas about patriarchal, pastoralist societies, and emphasise women’s roles in the reproduction of the family, society and the cattle herd. For example, when studying gender relations in pastoral societies, research has often focused on cattle-related activities *per se*, describing them as virtually an exclusively male domain. Feminist scholars have instead underlined the importance of non-cattle activities, which are often women’s work, in order to emphasise women’s centrality to pastoral society. This has also enabled an exploration of women’s perspectives. These studies have often looked beyond cattle production *per se* — for example small stock or market diversification (Smith 2015) — for women’s involvement in these groups, as well as milk production, and they acknowledge non-cattle activities that women dominate as being central to survival, ethnic identity and political influence. In contrast, I explore how women’s engagement within cattle production *per se*, and notably meat production, is entwined with gender dynamics.

In an introduction to the much-cited, edited volume on pastoralists in Africa, Dorothy Hodgson (2000) shows two key trends in research on pastoral societies: first, the switch of focus from men to women, presenting a female point of view, and second, a shift from a focus on structures and systems to an emphasis on processes and actors. Within such a framework Hodgson and Broch-Due (2000), criticise some of the earlier (male) writers on pastoral societies for “insist[ing] on minimizing female rights to underscore the strength of male authority” (Hodgson 2000: 13). Hodgson and Broch-Due (2000) – as did Talle (1987) and Dahl (1987) – set out to explore women’s rights and roles in pastoral societies, underlining their centrality in family and society.

Hodgson (2000) problematises a paradox often encountered in much earlier scholarly work on pastoral societies. She finds a tendency in this literature to provide “[...] a detailed description of female activities, rights and responsibilities, yet ignores this rich evidence when proclaiming the subordination of pastoral women” (Hodgson 2000: 3). In other words, she finds there has been a tendency, on the one hand, to point out women’s importance in pastoral societies, whilst on the other hand, failing to explore this data in the analysis of gender relations. Despite women’s equally important contribution to livestock production, more recent research also highlights that it is often underestimated, undervalued and ignored (Köhler-Rollefson 2012, Hovorka 2015). Exploring the possibilities of benefitting from cattle ownership from women’s different points of view, I show in

what ways different women cattle owners are able to use their participation in cattle production to negotiate their social status and sense of personhood.

Attention has been given to women's relatively easy access to certain livestock species through inheritance, marketing channels and collective action (Njuki and Sanginga 2013a) and the possibility to relocate the animals should living conditions change (Okali 2011). Still, sustainable development efforts consisting of livestock projects tend to focus on small stock, because cattle – and in particular exotic and imported breeds – are found to be much more likely to be assets controlled by men and thus might not benefit women equally (Chanamoto and Hall 2015). However, which livestock species women own can vary by region and culture and may also be dynamic, and women have been known to own dairy cows or bullocks, although these are often of less exotic breeds than those owned by men (Kristjanson et al. 2014). Waithanji et al. (2013) found that in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique men had higher preference for cattle than women did, and attributing this to longstanding gender structures of 'cattle cultures' noted by Herkovitz (1924) where cattle were a male domain, the authors note that "cattle still remain predominantly, and sometimes exclusively, men's property in sub-Saharan Africa" (Waithanji et al. 2013: 45).

Whereas women have been shown to control milk sales, women's participation in marketing of live animals, such as cattle, goat and sheep is limited (Waithanji et al. 2013). Further, women's significant participation in live animal markets tend to be limited to sheep and goats, and exclude cattle and camels, and research has shown women tend to have significantly more rights to access and control over livestock products than to the live animals themselves (ibid.). Literature on gender issues in livestock production has focused on small livestock and dairy cattle because of women's significant contribution and participation (Distefano 2013). Yet, studies from India (Bhanotra et al. 2015) and Ethiopia (Mulugeta and Amsalu 2014) found that women's participation in management decision and sales is low. However, there is relatively little research on women's roles and opportunities within the livestock sector in Africa, compared to the literature on land and crops (Okali 2011, Njuki and Sanginga 2013a, Hovorka 2015). Further, Hovorka (2015) calls for a focus on subsectors where women might not predominate but participate, such as cattle and larger scale operations. In Botswana, tales of women's involvement in cattle production are reported as a novelty or as a rare event in the news (Modikwa 2010, Tsiane 2010, Mokwape 2015) and women's roles in commercial beef production remain under-researched. I will explore how women's different roles and involvement in decision making within cattle

productions are linked to challenges and opportunities in benefitting from cattle ownership.

Hovorka (2015) points out that research on gender-livestock relations remains limited to particular social groups and production systems, and rarely extends into different income categories of women. Gendered livestock practices might differ between groups and as Kandiyoti (1988) shows, different sets of gender relations under different intersections of gender, race and class shape the 'rules of the game' providing the baseline from which women negotiate and strategise during social change. I investigate how women situated differently in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and class negotiate the rules of the game through their engagement in cattle production.

Under certain forms of patriarchy, Kandiyoti shows, women's strategies entail struggles for independent access to resources whereas under other forms of patriarchy, they might seek to strengthen the ties to husbands and families for increased security. Women do not, then, always follow 'the rules', but act also in disjunction to expectations and norms. However, certain acts of resistance to oppressive gender structures might also work to reproduce those structures by allowing certain spaces for 'letting off steam' (Kandiyoti 1998). I will explore how different women experience, relate to, reproduce and challenge various 'rules of the game' in what may be called specific gendered communities of practice, where gender is configured differently in relation to practices tied to the same animal species, such as the ones Birke and Brandt (2009), portrays in their account on horse riding.

By paying attention to how gender is articulated differently within Ghanzi cattle production, I show how certain power relations and material inequalities expressed through property relations and notably access to resources are established and depoliticised. Further, I show how material and social conditions allow women to negotiate various benefits from similar property relations. The effects on gender relations and women's property relations when resources gain economic market value have often painted a gloomy picture for women, as I discuss in the next section.

### **Gender and commercialisation of livestock production**

Investigating how different women cattle owners experience the impact of commercialisation on their ability to benefit from cattle, I draw on research on the commercialisation of natural resources and livestock. The attention that has been paid to women's roles, rights and responsibilities in livestock production has also made possible the exploration of gendered changes in property relations as a result of commercialisation of cattle (Dahl 1987).

While women's economic power and their access to productive resources can weaken traditionally unequal gender roles and empower poor women to work for further change (Batliwala and Dhanraj 2007), studies of the commercialisation of animal production – a shift in focus from livestock as a subsistence resource to animals as commodities to sell – have shown how women suffer from increasing gender inequalities (Dahl 1987, Talle 1988, Hodgson 1999a, Kristjanson et al. 2010, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b).

In the volume edited by Dahl discussed above, attention was given to changing gender relations in pastoral societies around Africa and elsewhere, some of which are focused on cattle. In Dahl's (1987) concluding chapter, she underlines how increased focus on selling animals leads to women's loss of control and influence over not only the animals themselves, but also over animal products, as well as in society at large. In Talle's (1988) account of changes in Maasai cattle herding society, notably concerning the commercialisation of cattle and its effect on gender relations, she confirms that the Maasai "are no exception to the trend" of men's increased control of family resources (Talle 1988: 1). Later writings on changes in Maasai societies have also emphasised women's loss of control of livestock assets (Wangui 2008). Further, Håkansson (1994) shows how women's abilities to negotiate new socially approved roles depends on what characteristics, status or roles that are seen as intrinsic to gender identities and what features can be discarded without the gender identity changing. Whereas Håkansson focuses on how women's primary kinship identity is associated with either natal kin or the husbands kin, I explore how ideas about women's relations to cattle affect their abilities to negotiate claims to cattle assets in a context of social change.

Curry (1996) discusses gender and livestock management in editing a volume of the *Human Ecology* journal on the topic that features discussions from different livestock systems. The papers look at, amongst other things, how age and gender influence livestock labour in Kenya (Roberts 1996), how the gender of the extension officer, farm owner and dairy operator of an intense dairy production operation influence intra-household impacts on benefits (Mullins et al. 1996), and how women's property rights are affected by economic changes (Oboler 1996). In his introduction to the volume, Curry (1996) emphasises women's unequal access to resources, lack of access to improvements of production as well as control over livestock products. Further, control of live animal sales tend to be highly gendered and Waithanji et al. (2013) found that in Kenya over seventy five per cent of their informants' cattle sales were controlled by men whereas women marketed almost seventy per cent of the live chickens sold. Further, Kvarmebäck et al.

(2015) show how increased commercialisation of agricultural production and the formalisation of individual land rights in Kenya led to increased flexibility of gender roles where men's and women's spheres overlap. However, while men engaged in commercial aspects of previously female activities such as milking and crop production, women's work loads increased as they became more engaged in time consuming activities increasing their work load such as the watering and herding of cattle, as men are engaged in income-generating activities, as well as small-scale businesses such as selling of agricultural products and poultry keeping. Nevertheless, while this led to women gaining control of their own income and household decision making, they were still excluded from cattle sales and handling larger sums of money. By focusing on women who *do* own cattle in Botswana today where the cattle sector has been the focus of government commercialisation efforts (Gulbrandsen 2012), I investigate in what ways women are able to access and benefit from their cattle ownership.

Through livestock ownership and management, and especially from the monetary benefits obtained from the sale of livestock or livestock products, women may increase their engagement in the community and market, as well as increase their bargaining power and decision making capacity within the household (Hovorka 2015). Participation in markets of smallholders depend on, as Waithanji et al. (2013) show in their study in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, numerous costs and benefits that also vary by gender. They point out that women tend to lack secure rights to production resources such as land, labour and capital, and thus face challenges in terms of support from formal financial institutions. They point out that participation in decision making over what animals and livestock products to sell as well as how to spend the money is important for women's ability to benefit from livestock production.

However, scholars have emphasised women's diminishing roles in livestock management when participation in formal markets and commercial operations expand (Kristjanson et al. 2010, Waithanji et al. 2013, Hovorka 2015). Whereas inclusion in markets has in certain contexts increased women's options and power in the family, it has sometimes also meant entering into a system where they have little control (Arora-Jonsson 2013: 223f, 2014: 302).

Ramdas et al. (2001) show how gendered access to both natural resources and local knowledge systems are affected by the commercialisation of crops and livestock in India. When agriculture started focusing on cash crops, women were manoeuvred out of decision-making, but were able to regain their social recognition through gender-conscious initiatives of animal

healing training, a practice that had ‘traditionally’ been reserved for men. The authors thus demonstrate how access to traditional knowledge systems can be an asset for women’s gender relations even in a commercialised setting. Similarly, cattle knowledge is often male coded in Botswana and looking at women’s access to that knowledge allows us to explore how it is linked to both material benefits and social status for women.

Rankin (2003) investigates the context of exchanges, and shows how market values do not simply replace ‘traditional’ values, but new regimes of value contain, define and are influenced by old ones, generating different opportunities for social groups positioned differently in society. Along with Rankin, I understand economic value as culturally given, and not something that is inherent to commodities and markets. Gardiner (2009) suggests that neoliberal efforts to ‘rationalize’ livestock production are shaped locally by post-colonial legacies of property relations and social norms. Characteristics to identify commercial or subsistence cattle farming has included the extent to which herd operators use modern technical inputs, the sales or off-take rates of the herd, the commercial intentions of the herd owner (Behnke 1987), as well as the use of native or exotic breeds (Burgess 2006) and the age of the animal at sales (Ransom 2011).

Further, subsistence and commercial use of cattle have been associated with distinct property rights to grazing land in Botswana, in a way that links communal, non-fenced grazing land with subsistence production and private, fenced grazing-land with commercial production (Van Engelen et al. 2013, Moslagae and Mogotsi 2013, Burgess 2006, Masike and Urich 2008, Ransom 2011), suggesting a permanency of emphasis. However, as Peters (2013) points out, the relation between producing food for subsistence consumption and producing for sale has been persistently misunderstood as separate systems, whereas they rather are, rather two different strategies, where the same farmer can use both strategies. Nevertheless, the use of the terms ‘communal’ and ‘commercial’ as binaries, and ‘communal farming’ as linked to ‘traditional’ farming (GoB 2014), or even ‘African farmers’ or ‘pastoralists’ (Gardner 2009) are still in use. The binaries of ‘communal’ and ‘private’ and ‘subsistence’ and ‘commercial’, whilst appearing to be opposites in some sense, are filled with assumptions related to evolutionary models of farming, grounded in colonial understandings on the concept of property (Peters 2013), and I explore how the use of such terms relate to the reproduction of inequalities in access to cattle and cattle assets. I will explore in what ways different women are able to make claims to the cattle market, and in what ways it



reinforces or challenges ideas about property relations linked to intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class.

In order to understand how the way that women make claims to cattle assets and how they benefit from their cattle ownership might change with commercialisation of livestock production, we need to think about how property relations mediate social relations and how they are gendered.

## Gender and property relations

Property regimes are not ‘things’ out in the world, but can be seen as what people *do* and how they relate to each other (Juul and Lund 2002: 4). *De jure*, by law, or *de facto*, in practice, ownership is only one aspect of those relations. Property is, according to Macpherson (1978), both an institution and a concept, which influence each other over time. Whereas the word *property* in daily speech is sometimes used to refer to things, it is analytically used to denote claims to material objects or immaterial resources enforced by society. Property mediates social relations between different kinds of social actors in relation to objects, or resources of value (Sikor and Lund 2009).

## Gender and property rights

Research on gender asymmetries in property rights has brought attention to their effects on environmental sustainability, equity and empowerment outcomes of natural resource use, such as land and water. Understanding property as *relations* to things and thus different from ‘mere’ physical possession acknowledges that these relations can be enforced as rights by society or the state, by custom, convention or the law (Macpherson 1978). Such rights are thus *enforceable* claims. As Sikor and Lund (2009: 1) put it: “Property is only property if socially legitimate institutions sanction it”. Rights can thus be thought of as legally and socially recognised claims that can be enforced by an external legitimised authority (Agarwal 1994b). Formalisation of rights has been shown to lead to privatisation of property in many cases (Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi 2007).

Arora-Jonsson (2014) points out that while research on gender and natural resources has focused on processes and informal mechanisms that produced gender inequalities in relation to property, policy aiming at equality in ownership and access to natural resources has focused on the formalisation of individual rights and women’s entry into the market. Scholars have argued for the need to identify a ‘bundle of rights’ rather than focus on a single owner of a resource (Meinzen-Dick et al. 1997). In this

view, property is not a single, unitary thing or relation, and a number of people might claim rights to access, use or alienation of a resource. This idea has been contested and Grey (1980) argued that the metaphor suggests an infinite divisibility of property into different abstract ‘things’. Although this image might take attention away from the content and relations between rights, as Rose (1994) suggests, it can serve to illustrate, for example the difference between private freehold grazing land and communal grazing areas. Whereas various rights are claimable by different people with access to communal grazing land, the same kind of rights are held by a more limited number of persons, or even a single person, on private land. However, communal land tenure does not necessarily mean insecure land tenure or competition (Peters 2002). I shall explore how property relations to land affect opportunities and challenges for women’s abilities to benefit from their cattle ownership.

Livestock property rights can be complex, and although formal ownership of the animals may be tied to a single person, a ‘bundle of rights’ to use or benefit from livestock assets could be spread over a number of persons (Johnson et al. 2015). For example, it is not rare that women in pastoral societies have access to and control over milk and milk products, while men have formal ownership, control herd management, meat production and sales (Njuki and Mburu 2013). In Botswana, the patron-client like *mafisa* system was based on privately owned cattle being distributed among subjects who had the rights to milk, draught power and sometimes offspring in return for political support (Schapera 1994, Gulbrandsen 2012, Bolt and Hillbom 2013b). I explore the implications of individualisation of such property relations with the commercialisation of cattle production.

Whereas land ownership and user rights are commonly documented in African countries in a formal way, livestock ownership is often not (Njuki and Sanginga 2013b). This informal character of livestock property can pose challenges for women if their livestock ownership is contested (Kristjanson et al. 2014). In Botswana registered cattle brands are used to mark ownership and I show how property relations to cattle take on some of the same characteristics as land and other livestock, but also differ.

Rose (1994) writes about the power of visual markers of property, and its potential to communicate a sense of permanence. A fence across land, or a brand on a cow then suggests that the negotiation is over and property relations are fixed. This is of course rarely the case, as fences are relocated and cattle rebranded. These visual markers do, however, make a strong claim to ownership, access and rights. That is, if they are recognised as

markers of rights. I will investigate what role visual markers such as fences and brands have for property relations to cattle in Botswana and for women's ability to benefit from the formal market.

However, the way to justify property differs between times, places and groups of people. Sikor and Lund (2009) illustrate that property is intimately tied up with authority and power. Socially legitimate institutions can justify property rights, while the acceptance of such justifications at the same time authorises the institutions as legitimate (Sikor and Lund 2009).

Although documented *de jure* ownership of land or cattle can be an avenue for more secure property relations for the owner, views differ on whether or not a focus on customary law is more beneficial for women (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003). Whitehead and Tsikata (2003), in their discussion of policy discourses on women's land rights in Sub-Saharan Africa, note that customary rights cannot today be considered in isolation, and that formalising customary law might lead to solidifying of formerly flexible practices. Local practices may interact, as Rankin (2003) suggests, with wider-scale non-linear processes so that the agency of local actors dialectically interact with structural changes, such as commercialisation, in ways that produce specific configurations of old and new property relations.

Peters (1992, 1984) has shown how struggles over the naming of key categories of social organisation have been crucial to understanding the processes of the transformation of grazing rights in the emergence of private claims to grazing land in Kgatleng, Botswana. Connotations of the different terms used for the group of people controlling the bore holes emphasised to different degrees private or communal access. Political control over water and land can be understood by thinking of the processes involved as struggles over meaning as much as over resources (1984). Struggles over resources or over power then necessarily take place in terms of meanings, Peters (1984) argues, where different categories or groups assign different meanings to acts. Property rights are thus one important aspect of property relations, but in order understand how women benefit from the ownership of a certain resource, we need to look at their access to cattle and cattle assets more broadly.

### **Gendered access to resources and assets**

Sikor and Lund (2009: 6) articulate access as 'ability to benefit'. The ability to derive benefits from things here includes material objects, persons, institutions and symbols. It is about the full gamut of means by which a person is able to benefit from things. Different political-economic circumstances change the terms of access and may therefore change which

specific individuals or groups may benefit most from a set of resources. Similarly, Agarwal (1994b) points out that one might have access to a resource without having the possibility to claim it as a right. A focus on the ability to benefit from certain resources helps us understand the dynamics of unequal access when *de jure* property rights are gender neutral. That is, when *de jure* ownership is in place, different men and women might not have the same ability to operationalize and make use of their ownership. I study how different women's cattle ownership can mean diverse things in terms of access and benefits, at various intersections of power relations.

Ribot and Peluso (2003) understand power as the capacity of some actors to affect the practice and ideas of others, and is thus emergent from, though not always attached to, people. Ribot and Peluso draw on Ghani's (1995: 2) concept of 'bundles of power', that influence how an actor can gain access, maintain access and control access. *Gaining access* is the general process by which access to a resource is established, *access maintenance* is the ability to keep a particular sort of resource access open, and *controlling access* to a resource is the ability to mediate others' access to that resource. Ribot and Peluso (2003) outline different aspects of access that are important in order for someone to benefit from a natural resource, and focus on: 1. Access to technology; 2. Access to capital; 3. Access to markets; 4. Access to labour; 5. Access to knowledge; 6. Access to authority; 7. Access through social identity; and 8. Access via negotiations of other social relationships. The importance of each of them is however dependent on the attributes of the situation under analysis. I will examine how these aspects of access matter for women's ability to benefit from their cattle ownership in both material and non-material ways.

Agarwal (1994b) emphasises the potential disparity between ownership and control of resources and argues that because land has historically been the basis of political power and social status as well as being important in relation to many people's sense of identity in South Asia, "the gender gap in the ownership and control of property is the single most critical contributor to the gender gap in economic well-being, social status and empowerment" (Agarwal 1994b: 1455). Men's land access cannot be assumed to equally benefit women (Agarwal 1994b, 2003a), but at the same time women of wealthy landed households do benefit from their husbands' class positions in terms of living standard and social status (Agarwal 1994a). Agarwal also argues that women's independent ownership and control over property, as opposed to joint ownership and shared control with their husbands, is crucial for their welfare, effective resource use and for gender equality and empowerment (Agarwal 1994b,

2003a). Further, she holds that a focus on men's and women's relative access of individual and independent property rights and control over property is of importance to understand the material basis of unequal gender relations. Here, social recognition of women's ownership can be a limiting factor for property relations (Agarwal 1994b). Thus, religion or cast intersects with gender, class, cultural norms and marital status to define the conditions of women's access to property. I will investigate how women's access to and control over cattle, relative to that of men, is important for their material welfare and social status. Taking control over cattle then goes beyond *de jure* ownership of the animal as well as the power to decide over the entire cattle production process, including the rights to decide over herd management, when to sell an animal and how to use the money from sales.

Although married women might benefit from their husbands' class position and economic status, women across class divides share issues of subordination linked to control over property. Jackson (2003: 157) criticises Agarwal (2003a) for assuming that the centrality of land to male poverty automatically means that it is also central to women's poverty. The way that land rights affect women would depend, she points out, on class, in that the users of the land are not always the owners of the land. Although access to different natural resource assets, including livestock, is relevant to gender relations, it is also important to recognise women's choices not to engage in practices that might seem beneficial from the outside.

Jackson (2003) observes that making land claims from the husband and other kin can be a complex and even contradictory course of action for women, and that in some contexts, avenues other than property control might be better for women. For example, where a certain resource is tied to masculinity and the male role of provider, land redistribution within the household might upset family dynamics. Agarwal (2003b), however, cautions that women's refrainment from individual property control for the sake of household tranquillity endangers gender struggles. In her account of women in Nepal who chose to decline their right to inherit land, Rankin (2003) explores how strategies to avoid potential exclusion from social networks and material security lead some women to adapt to dominant and gendered world views of women as dependent on men. She shows how conforming to normative gender beliefs is a conscious choice for these women, rather than a blindness to the power relations of which they are part.

Rao (2008), on the other hand, shows how marriage in India is not only about conflict and struggle but also about cooperation and mutuality. Further, a woman in a landed household where her land is to be claimed

from the husband is in a different position than if her land rights are adding new land to the household. In successful marriages, women find prestige in forwarding male prestige, and thus share prestige with their husbands. Sharing of work and responsibility between a married couple can be a way for women to assert their identity as women, writes Rao (2008: 215), and also demanding to be appreciated and valued in themselves, not only in role-defined identities as home-makers. Gaining status in their role as home-makers can be a path for women to gain value as persons (ibid.), perhaps not only in relation to men but in relation to other groups in society constructed through class and ethnicity. I will explore how different women's property relations to cattle are produced in relation to ideas about what it means to be a wife.

Whereas women in a position to benefit from patriarchal property relations, such as for example wives of wealthy landed husbands, might play along with the patriarchal game, Jackson (2003) notes, it is perhaps women who are not offered much by such logic that might engage in what she calls gender experimentation and change. Instances of transgressing ideas about 'how things should be' are sometimes understood as negative, and even 'wicked', as Hodgson and McCurdy (2001) show, but can lead to pushing the boundaries of what is seen as acceptable. In this way, the authors note, such instances can become sites for negotiations and perhaps transformations in gender relations, social practices and cultural norms. I will investigate in what ways such negotiations take place around different women's cattle ownership and access to cattle assets, while acknowledging the possibility for conflicts between spouses and within families, without assuming that this is always the case.

The way that domestic politics around property rights and access to resources are negotiated vary, as Carney and Watts (1990) note in their study of gender relations during the implementation of a rice project in India that affected property rights. They found that ethnicity, economic status of the household as well as conjugal relations define how successfully women negotiated compensation from their husbands for the increased labour demands that the project entailed. I will explore how conditions for women cattle owners in Ghanzi might vary between ethnicity, race and class in ways that could affect their possibilities for negotiating benefits from their cattle ownership. The particular condition of farming families where labour and property are united, Carney and Watts (1990) suggest, makes it possible to combine production politics and family politics into one process, highlighting intersecting power dynamics, where gender relations and property relations are at stake at the same time.

Analysing access by identifying and mapping the mechanisms by which access to different benefits derived from cattle is gained, maintained and controlled will allow me to understand why some women are able to benefit from their cattle in ways that others are not.

One way of asserting such immaterial benefits can be to create one's person by way of narratives. Beyond tangible societal change, people also create their own stories of 'how it used to be' in relation to 'how it is today' (Rose 1994, Fortmann 1995). Fortmann (1995) shows in her study of discursive claims over access to land in Zimbabwe how stories serve to bolster people's confidence in their claims to access natural resources on someone else's land. Farmers' and villagers' tales about how a certain fence was built and managed by a commercially-oriented farmer around land where villagers previously had access to forage, show how stories of past access served as a marker for the present in that they create meaning and validate actions. Stories, Fortmann (1995) shows, can also mobilise action and define alternatives to the present situations. By letting the stories begin at different points in time, commercial farmers and villagers managed to draw on different kinds of claims, such as historical, 'traditional' claims or legal property rights. By examining women's representations of the 'good old days' as contrasting to the 'modern times' in relation to men's role as provider and women's independent income earning, Cornwall (2001) shows how 'tradition' can become a means for expressing thoughts and feelings of contemporary events.

In Botswana, it is difficult to establish how many women cattle owners there have been in the past, and in what ways they have been engaged in cattle production. I will examine how women cattle owners today frame questions about women's engagement in cattle production and how they place themselves in relation to women of earlier generations in order to create an idea of themselves as women in certain ways in the present. By doing so, I show how stories painting cattle practices as static and associated with gender, ethnicity, race and land tenure not only differ from what is really going on around the *kraals*, but are also used by women to both reproduce expected ways of being a woman and to challenge them to gain material and social benefits. With cattle tied to a history of political and social importance, access to cattle can be linked to social recognition and who one is as a person in relation to others.

## **Gendered property relations and personhood**

Struggles to gain access to valued resources can be struggles to gain personhood as a complete being, not simply taking on an expected role as a woman (Rao 2008: 175). Resource control produces wellbeing for women as gendered subjects, potentially beyond the physical asset it offers, and onto symbolic meanings (ibid.). Land, among Rao's informants, is a social resource associated with a history of community and kinship represented by men. Women without land were thus unable to act as autonomous individuals. It is this social consideration of land that allows the claiming of land for women to be a way of claiming full personhood as equally valued persons within their society (ibid.). In this, the land, or in my case cattle, become crucial as a discursive resource in the negotiation of power between genders and between different groups in society (ibid.). The struggle for land among her informants in India, Rao (2008: 299) holds, "signified much more than a struggle for an economic resource, a deeper struggle over cultural, ideological, moral and political questions".

Similarly, Agarwal (1994b) notes how control over land holds the potential both for women to satisfy both practical needs and at the same time offer possibilities to negotiate gender relations. In Botswana, such social importance is not tied to land but to cattle (Russell and Russell 1979, Kuper 1982, Wilmsen and Vossen 1990, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953)). By looking at how women engage differently in terms of access to and control of cattle as a specific species, I wish to contribute to the literature about gender and property literature by showing how material welfare and social status can be negotiated by women who have ownership of culturally valued productive resources in a setting where they are associated with men.

Rao (2008) writes that we need to reframe the debate on gender and property ownership to include notions of 'personhood'. This entails looking beyond the binaries of, for example, men and women, dominant and subordinate, and so on, to a relational perspective on how social processes linked to property ownership accentuate different ways of becoming a 'full person' in different contexts. Jackson (2003) cautions, however, that property integral to men's personhood might not be as important for women's personhood in certain settings, and recommends empirical investigations of the matter. I will investigate to what extent women cattle owners in Ghanzi benefit from cattle in terms of personhood, and if they benefit in different ways than those commonly associated with men's cattle ownership. Conceptualisations of what women in general do or do not do, tell us little about what women actually do in material terms, as underlined by Rao (2008), but rather how their engagement is pictured in the socio-symbolic



realm. I will show how the different ways that women are associated or not with cattle are of importance for their claims to personhood.

In analysing legal rights, Radin (1982) makes a distinction between personal and ‘fungible’ property. Personal property is that which is tied to one’s person – that without which one cannot be the same person, such as a loved house or personal item important for one’s identity – and property that is ‘fungible’ or exchangeable for another item or for money, such as furniture without sentimental value. A focus on the importance of certain property for self-constitution, or personhood, can help us understand how some property claims are important for social positions and benefits, and I will investigate how this plays out in relation to cattle in Botswana.

In an effort to reframe the gender and property debate, Rao (2008: 290) calls for a theoretical distinction between property relations to different kinds of material resources in relation to their control and management. The conceptualisations of property need to accommodate the different social values attached to different kinds of resources, related in different ways to personhood. Njuki and Sanginga (2013b) specify that when looking at livestock ownership, one needs to differentiate which animal species women own, in order to understand how and why they benefit from them. Different livestock species might, in other words, allow for different social and monetary benefits. Comaroff and Comaroff (1990) note that the term ‘property’ in English and the term *khumó* in Setswana identify simultaneously both the nature of the possession and the ability to enhance wealth because of that possession. Among the Tswana they studied, the authors note, only cattle held the combination of both meanings, which has significance for the social identity of both individuals and groups. I will explore in what ways cattle ownership in Botswana might offer benefits to women that other livestock species do not.

Moreover, in Botswana as elsewhere, women are far from a homogenous group, and I will explore how intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class position women differently in terms of property relations to cattle and their ability to benefit from cattle assets.

## Intersectionality as a tool

With a focus on the cattle sector in Botswana, I will explore how different women are able to benefit from their cattle ownership. By understanding diverse social categories as interdependent and in interaction rather than working in isolation of each other, an intersectional analysis highlights the various ways in which people experience and produce power relations,

where experiences of intersections of categories of subordination can be larger than their sum (Crenshaw 1989). An intersectionality approach enables an exploration of how distinct dimensions of social relationships are mutually constructed in interlinked processes of difference, such as gender, class, ethnicity, race and class as well as relations to species livestock species (Hovorka 2012). As defined by Leslie McCall (2005: 1771), intersectionality is “the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations”. The focus lies on how self-images and relations to others emerge through different social processes, instead of seeing them as inherently stable psychological, social or biological essences, and the way that ‘differences’ emerge from social relations in a way that is an ongoing and interactional process (West and Fenstermaker 1995: 9).

Mohanty (1988) offers a critique of the Western feminist discourse on women in the ‘Third World’ and questions the analytical categories of Women, Third World Women, African Women, and so on. She cautions against equating the analytical category of ‘woman’ with the material reality of women as subjects. Mohanty (1988) warns that such simplifications hinder our attempts to see the complexity of specific situations. She suggests, for example, that we should not start with the premises that women are oppressed, but instead understand women as being constituted through social relations, which would lead us to try to understand how their different positions in society are constructed through interaction with others. Instead of regarding men and women as two groups possessing already constituted categories of experience and interests prior to their social relations, they should be understood as being constituted as women and men through these categories in various ways.

I will look at how gender is shaping and shaped by women’s socio-symbolic associations with and actual relations to cattle, and how it is created and articulated by differently situated women through gender, ethnicity, race and class.

## **Gender**

To show how different women are able to benefit from cattle ownership for their social positions and material welfare, I need to look at how gender relations in society create opportunities and challenges for these women. Using gender as a tool of analysis allows me to explore how ideas about what it means to be a woman in different contexts materialise in property relations to cattle in various ways. I am using gender as an analysis of power relations through which a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ is defined and made

to appear as natural in different environmental contexts (Nightingale 2006). The social and political are in this way always linked to the biophysical and non-human surroundings and impossible to separate on the ground (Arora-Jonsson 2014). As Hovorka (2015) notes, gender-livestock relations are grounded in what it means to be a man or a woman in particular contexts.

Gender is something we ‘do’ and is done in social settings (West and Zimmerman 1987), rather than a role or a set of traits belonging to an isolated individual. Further, it is not something that is done separately from our daily actions, but rather is done through them, so that ‘doing cattle farming’ is simultaneously ‘doing gender’. Learning and practising gender may be thought of as an interaction of both structural forces and the more or less conscious choices of individuals (Connell and Connell 2005). This dialectical view of structures and social actors underlines social life as something that is actively played out in varying cultural contexts, valuing certain types of projects and goals (Ortner 2001, 2006). All social actors thus have agency, although they are socially embedded and always engaged with other social actors in such a way that they can never be completely free. People strive to pursue projects and intentions in historically specific socio-cultural contexts with certain constraints, limitations and opportunities. Thus, while the possibilities of what are understood as valued and meaningful projects and activities are defined by a specific socio-historic context, each individual has a degree of freedom to choose and carry out such projects (Ortner 2001, 2006).

Ortner (2001) shows how interpreting women’s actions as pursuing projects with certain intentions rather than seeing their actions as resisting oppressive structures, brings to the fore the desires and needs of women that grow out of their own structures of life, including inequalities. While Ortner addresses Comaroff’s (1985) and Comaroff and Comaroff’s (1997) accounts of Tswana women’s rituals of initiation into adult life and female coded agriculture as culturally constituted projects, I will explore how women in Ghanzi relate to cattle projects traditionally constituted as male pursuits.

By seeing gender as power relations mutually constituted with the surrounding environment (Nightingale 2006) of commercial cattle production in Ghanzi, I explore how gender is expressed through what is thought to be appropriate property relations to cattle for women in different contexts and the ways in which they form projects that are important to them.

Hovorka (2012) shows how in Botswana at large, men and women are associated with different species in ways that privilege men and cattle over women and chickens. She shows how the privileging and ‘othering’, or subordinating, of certain animal species shapes both relations between

humans and between humans and animals, and how these dynamics might change with changes in agricultural opportunities. With the development of commercial production and agribusiness, women in the urban setting of Gaborone have used the traditional idea of poultry farming as ‘women’s work’ and chose to engage in commercial agricultural production otherwise dominated by men (Hovorka 2006). While cattle are not generally associated with women in Botswana, I will explore in what ways that women are associated to various cattle related practices (or not) and how those associations differ between intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class. As Kandiyoti (1988, 1998) notes in relation to various expressions of patriarchy, the ‘rules of the game’ to which women have to relate might also differ between different communities of gendered cattle practices. I will show how women negotiate the rules around gendered property relations to cattle in ways that affect their ability to benefit from their cattle ownership.

### **Ethnicity**

Botswana is a multicultural country, and people involved in cattle production in Ghanzi define themselves and others by relating to a range of ethnicities. In the words of Ballard (2002: 28), who writes about migration, ethnicity and law in South East Asia, ethnicity is the “articulation of cultural distinctiveness in situations of political and/or economic competition”. Ethnicity is thus the process by which cultural differences are ascribed meaning and importance. Similarly, Hylland-Eriksen (1991), in his discussion of the term, conceptualises ethnicity as a type of social process in which notions of cultural difference are communicated. This means that what makes the Batswana of Ghanzi Batswana is not some inherent characteristic shared by members of that group, but the shared meanings expressed in symbols and experienced through various social relations and inequalities.

In understanding the concept of culture, I lean on Ortner’s (2006) formulation. She understands culture to be the politically imposed understandings of the world through which people see and act, and the subjectivities formed by social relations through which people understand themselves and the world. These understandings also define the culturally valued projects discussed above and identify what is seen as worth pursuing, something that is always contextually situated and informed by a historic context. On a broad level, these projects are what lend meaning and purpose to life according to the person’s own values, drawn from structurally defined differences of social categories. As such, they can differ between age groups or between women and men.

I use ethnicity in two ways: as an analytical concept to show how people produce and reproduce ethnic categories by ways of relating to cattle practices and gender; and as a term used by people to indicate a specific group assumed to share a certain cultural heritage. As an analytical concept, ethnicity intersects with gender in that expressions of what it means to be a woman or a man differ between expressions of ethnicity.

Ethnicity is more than a differentiation of equally valued cultural histories. As Wilmsen (1993) argues, ethnicity grows out of unequal power relations. Peluso (2009) shows in her examination of rubber production in Indonesia how ethnicity is produced through different practices of land use. I will pay attention to how ethnicity in Botswana is produced through cattle practices in ways that simultaneously produce gender. Thus ethnicity is a process of differentiation that leads to the creation and re-creation of ethnic categories based on attributes that are locally constructed as significant (Wilmsen and Vossen 1990, Hylland-Eriksen 1991). These ethnic categories are then reinforced by the simplification of features into a generalised idea of both othering and selfhood, anchored to a sense of collectivity (Wilmsen and Vossen 1990). These processes and the categories produced from them are, as stressed by both Wilmsen and Vossen (1990) and Ballard (2002), outcomes of unequal economic and political processes (framed by Wilmsen and Vossen as unequal labour relations). In this way, ethnicity is linked to class, as I shall discuss further below.

In everyday language use, ethnicity is often used as a reference to a specific group of people that one can belong to – so that, for example, an Afrikaner is something one ‘is’. This is how cattle farmers in Ghanzi themselves used the terms Tswana, Kgalagadi, Nharo, Herero, Afrikaner and English. Kent (2002) writes about ethnicity in the Kalahari region in terms of ‘boundary maintenance’ based on emic ideas of what separates oneself from other groups. I will show how such boundary maintenance works through gendered ideas about cattle practices. Peluso (2009) explains that although terms associated with ethnicity in Indonesia where she works are generally not problematised, they refer to people with different associations with a specific ethnic heritage or with different experiences thereof. When I talk about, for example, Herero women, I am referring to a constructed social group that is used by people in Ghanzi as a way to categorise themselves and others.

Exploring how women benefit from cattle ownership in Ghanzi involves a consideration of the historical significance of ethnicity. Ethnicity intersects with gender so that the different actions, choices and ways of relating to cattle that are considered customary vary between ethnic groups in Botswana.

Looking at different ways in which women's engagement in cattle production are valued will help me explore how cattle ownership matters for women of different ethnic groups. In understanding how cattle ownership matters beyond material welfare in different contexts, we need to first explore expectations concerning for whom cattle ownership is valued and in what ways. A focus on ethnicity can help me to show how inequalities are generated from a society's communication of cultural differences. Further, ethnicity is sometimes linked to notions of race.

## **Race**

Inequalities between social groups in Botswana are in important ways linked to a history of racialisation, as I discuss in chapter 4. Race can best be understood as the expression of economic, political, ideological and social processes (Bhavnani 1993, 2001). Rather than being a biological category, race is created and reproduced through economic, political and ideological institutions (Bhavnani 1993: 32). As such, race is the process by which people are categorised into different groups based on presumed important, phenotypical traits. Mollett (2006: 78) uses the term *racialization* for "the process of assigning different values to constructed cultural, phenotypical, and biological characteristics". These traits, however, are only made important through their social construction, which can be tied to social institutions of inequality. Moore, Pandian and Kosek (2003) agree that neither 'race' nor 'nature' are natural but forged by history, social struggles and often by each other. Articulated together, ideas of race and nature legitimise inequalities by essentialising people, territories and animals. Race can work to biologise culture, and cultural difference, made socially important through ethnicity, can be used to mark race. Thus, we need to understand the statements from people in Ghanzi that identify people as 'white', 'black' or 'San', as part of social processes of differentiation as well as having a role in highlighting appearance. Further, Mollet and Faria (2013) show through what they call *postcolonial intersectionality*, how racism and patriarchy are mutually constructed in shaping human-environment relationships. Race, as a way of looking at not only differentiation but also power thus 'messes with' gender in different ways (ibid.: 118).

However, ethnicity and 'race' are in reality often interconnected, as people ascribed a certain race are often also ascribed a certain ethnicity. In Ghanzi, Afrikaner and English for example speak different languages and are perceived as having different 'cultural traditions' tied to ethnicities, and thus form and reproduce different ethnic groups. At the same time they are

by themselves and others often assumed to share understandings of the world as part of the 'white' community.

Race, Sundberg (2008) argues, is bound up with ideas about nature and what constitutes humans' appropriate relations to their surroundings, or 'environmental imaginaries', which articulates with natural resource allocations and political economy (Sundberg 2008: 569). In her study on race and property relations to land in Latin America, Sundberg shows that by categorising Spanish land use as appropriate, rational and productive while indigenous land use was classed as irrational and unproductive, colonial political boundaries between social groups were drawn that justified and fixed unequal social relations. I extend 'environmental' to include cattle in my analysis, to explore how cattle practices are integral to racialisation in Botswana. As Sundberg notes, discourses of ethnicity can draw on ideas that certain 'backward' cultural traits tie certain groups of people to 'traditional' use of resources that stands in opposition to development. I will explore how ideas about what is 'traditional' (as opposed to 'commercial' cattle farming) work to essentialise ethnicity and race through association with different cattle practices.

I examine how race and ethnicity become important to property relations when they are used as legitimising claims to access resources such as land, water and cattle but also technology, labour and the market. Looking at how Miskito and Garifuna people in Honduras use racial rhetoric when rationalising their territorial property claims, Mollet (2006) shows how natural resource struggles are also racial struggles. Racialised discursive strategies that essentialise Miskito identities as 'backward' Indians draw on their nomadic history to argue that, for example, they do not know how to manage money and, blinded by poverty, they thus sell land cheaply to others. Such rhetoric become arguments in struggles over land. I will show how essentialist notions of race become salient in naturalising unequal access to land and cattle in Botswana.

The rules of these discursive practices, Mollet (2006) emphasises, are informed by a history of racial ideologies favouring, amongst other things, fair skin and Christianity. Similar mechanisms are to be found in Ghanzi where cattle farming practices are built around relations of race. In this sense, struggles of cattle farming can be seen as simultaneous struggles of race. Colonial processes and their aftermaths are, however, different (Radcliffe 2005) and plural, as Comaroff (1997) noted for South Africa. In contrast to Mollet's (2006) account of Honduras, the struggles of cattle farming in Ghanzi are not openly between people or groups of people. The reproducing nature of cattle as a resource allows for the imagined

possibility that they are equally accessible to all, and I will show how cattle farming struggles are framed as struggles with the natural environment and the infrastructure of the cattle sector rather than as struggles between groups with unequal property relations to grazing land and cattle. In destabilising taken-for-granted categories created by colonial encounters, as postcolonial approaches to development have done (McEwan 2001), we can rethink women's property relations to cattle through bringing to the fore how ethnicity and race qualify gender. In addition, I shall look at how class is integrally linked to these dynamics.

### **Class**

In the usage of class as an intersecting category of analysis, I am primarily interested in two things. The more 'objective' class categories constructed through wealth (Bolt and Hillbom 2013a) – cattle and land in Ghanzi – and the accompaniment of social ranking (Ortner 2006) that often, but not, always overlap.

Through constructing social tables based on income and wealth, Bolt and Hillbom (2013a) outline seven social classes in Botswana for the period of 1936 to 1964. As Botswana was at that point in time a cattle economy, the authors use cattle herd size and land tenure as an indicator of wealth. Today, Botswana is marked by a dual society where on the one hand the mining industry has paid for important social developments, with forty per cent of its GDP invested in primarily infrastructure and human capital; and on the other hand a rural country characterised by wealth measured in land and cattle amassed by the elite, low technology farming, high unemployment and dependency on government drought relief programmes (Hillbom 2014). This means that although there has been a rapidly growing middle class in Botswana since independence (Taylor 2012) class structures in Ghanzi, being predominantly cattle country, as I discuss in chapter 5, needs to be understood through property rights of land and cattle.

Government administrators, traders and labourers constitute separate classes, but as I focus on cattle owners I will use the three social classes related to cattle. Bahta and Baker (2015) found in their study on profits of smallholder cattle farmers in Botswana that there were variations of possible profit between those who had less than the equivalent of ten head of marketable beef cattle, those that had between ten and twenty, and those with more than twenty. Further, Peters (2002) shows how an acquisition of land rights in Botswana is tied to larger patterns of formations of wealth and class. I shall thus use cattle herd size and land tenure as markers of class, as I discuss further in chapter 3 on methods.



Although linked to class based on wealth, class as social strata allows for an understanding of differentiation based on association of people with a certain wealth group, regardless of their actual wealth (Ortner 2006). Locally coded expressions of class are then based on shared expressions within class groups, creating differential positions on a scale of social (dis)advantage (ibid.). By ways of sharing these expressions and certain social premises, class is linked to culture in that class groups tend share understandings of the world. Class culture can be seen as a property invested differently in people (Skeggs 2005). This property is then a set of entitlements to which certain people have access, and others do not. Class divisions, and their gendered expressions, are then drawn by attributing negative value to others, where some are excluded by others from recognisable worth, or proper personhood.

This means that aside from the material realities, communities of value are formed where expressions of shared meaning and belonging include excluding people based on the performance of class. In Ghanzi, cattle are integral to various cultures, where emphasising certain cattle practices is a way of distinguishing between groups. Cattle practices are linked to property relations to land, and closely associated with class. Although class is often unremarked on in daily dialogues in Ghanzi, and is even disguised by talk of ethnicity and race, it is very much present in both of the forms discussed above.

Thinking about what different women's cattle ownership entails in terms of property relations to their cattle and the way in which they can benefit from them requires data on how different women perceive cattle production from their various points of view, how they perceive gender relations and how they relate to their cattle. In the next chapter, I discuss how I collected my data and how I analysed it.



## 3 Methodology and Methods

### Introduction

Throughout the research process there were choices to be made regarding what kind of data to collect, how to collect it and how to analyse it. This chapter deals with those choices and how I went about to understand what cattle ownership means to women in terms of property relations, access to cattle and abilities to benefit from cattle assets in the wake of commercialisation.

In the first section, I explain how I prepared for the main field work season and how I came to work in Ghanzi District in Botswana. The section outlines how my research questions motivated an ethnographic methodology and how I conducted a pilot study to prepare for my main field work season. I also describe how I lived and travelled in the district and discuss some initial practical concerns. I explain in the second section how I organised my field study and how I selected informants for the core interviews. I discuss how my research questions and intersectionality approach guided me to include women cattle owners keeping cattle under different conditions. The section also includes a discussion on language and translation, explaining how I worked with translators for different languages.

The third section focuses on my use of participant observation as a data collection method, and explains how I participated in cattle activities, daily chores and cattle related meetings. The section also includes a discussion on ethical considerations in the field as well as reflections on how I might have influenced the data collection and how my choice of informants might have affected my data. In the fourth section I discuss how data from core informants were thematically analysed and explain how I used data from key

informants and the pilot study. The concluding section considers what kind of data I have acquired and what kind of information I am able to draw from it.

## **Preparing for an ethnographic methodology**

My focus on if and how women are able to benefit from their cattle ownership and how this might be affected by the commercialisation of cattle production, led me to consider working in a country where cattle are important for people's livelihoods and social relations. After considering a few options, Botswana with its political, social and economic history integrally linked to cattle farming, not the least through its beef export to Europe, offered a setting relevant to my inquiries. I began to study secondary sources such as scholarly articles, government reports and statistics. In order to understand the various possibilities and challenges facing women cattle owners, I needed to get a proper sense of the context in which these women live and farm. I thus chose an ethnographic methodology for primary data collection.

### **An ethnographic methodology**

To gain a better understanding of cattle farming I decided to carry out participant observation at a number of cattle operations. In this way I could observe and experience myself what it meant to farm cattle and gain some insight into what laws and regulations meant in practice. Taking an 'ethnographic stance' as advocated by Geertz (1973) and others, I aimed to take part in all aspects of cattle farming in Ghanzi. An ethnographic stance aims at an understanding of the phenomena under study through the richness, texture and detail achieved by a thorough contextualisation. As such, I aimed at investigating how differently situated women experienced diverse challenges and opportunities in relation to cattle ownership to understand the complexity of power relations in connection to cattle production. When gathering data in the field, attention then needs to be given to conflicting pieces of information, apparent paradoxes and contradictions in order to inform the analysis of the multiple ways of engagement possible within similar situations.

In ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation and interviewing, it is the self that is the primary tool of research, where the researcher is active in producing the meaning that in the end is framed as research outcomes. Thus, as Ortner (2006) emphasises, the 'ethnographic stance' is as much an intellectual positionality as a bodily process in space and time in that it uses a constructive mode of investigation. So while it is

the empirical data that determine the conclusions of the analytical process, the analytical process starts with trying to determine what kind of data that is important, a process that is influenced by how the researcher experiences and perceives that data.

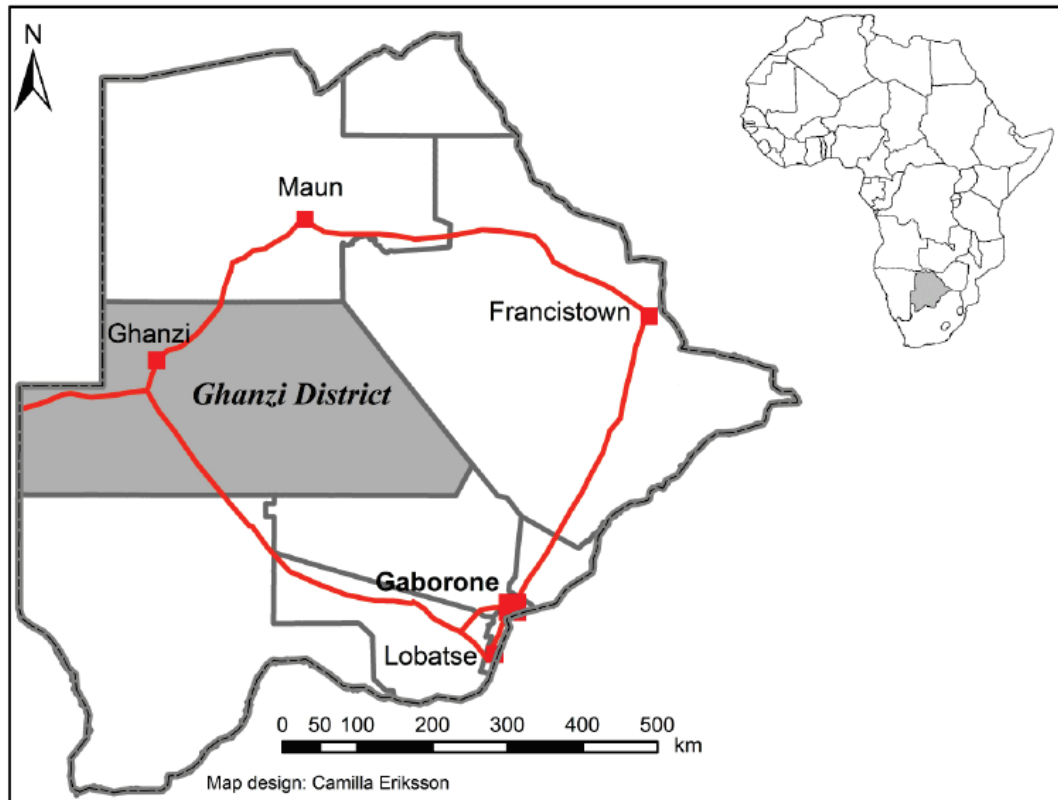
As I knew little about the context of the Botswana cattle sector when starting the research it soon became clear that I would need to do a substantial period of fieldwork in order to situate my findings. But where to start?

### **Pilot study showing complexity**

I looked up the Sweden-Botswana Friendship Association (BOTSFA) in Stockholm and asked if I could come and present my project at one of their meetings. They welcomed me and the evening provided me with interesting conversations, background information, new questions and contact information to a few cattle farmers for a pilot study.

To get an idea of how women in different positions and with different social backgrounds experience their participation in cattle production, I included cattle owners from different ethnicities and ages, and with different land tenure and herd sizes in the sample. Initially, the idea was to include people from a diversity of backgrounds rather than focus on any specific group, but after a pilot study it became clear that differences in class and ethnicity were analytically important.

During the three-week pilot study I interviewed men and women who owned cattle in Maun, in Ghanzi District including Charleshill sub-district and around Gaborone. In order to get a feel for the landscape, I drove from Gaborone through Francistown, up to Maun and around to Ghanzi. Before heading down to Gaborone again, I drove out to Charleshill and back. The map below shows where Ghanzi District is situated in Botswana.



Map of Botswana.

Exploratory and semi-structured interviews were conducted with both male and female cattle owners with different herd sizes from Batswana and Afrikaner families. In order to situate my informants' meaning-making around cattle and gender, I asked informants what changes they had perceived throughout their lifetime, and in particular how increased participation in global capitalism had changed their notions of gendered relations to cattle and women's opportunities of cattle farming.

Further, I visited cattle herds on both fenced farms and non-fenced communal grazing land for participant observation in different areas. The pilot field study was conducted in October 2012 to prepare for the main field season that was to stretch from mid April to late December 2013. During the pilot trip I also held seminars at University of Botswana, Botswana College of Agriculture and at the Okavango Research Institute and discussed my research proposal with scholars working there.

Themes emerged from the pilot study interviews that helped me frame my main field season. Among the most important was data that suggested that an increased need for money, together with increasingly gender-conscious legislation concerning access to bank loans and grazing land, might have affected women's cattle ownership, in that alternative means to increased living standards had become available to women. Therefore,

during the longer field season, I planned to explore how farmers' need for and access to money relates to women's motivation for engaging in cattle production. It also became clear that the way in which these changes were connected to the government's efforts to increase productivity in commercial cattle production would also call for further examination.

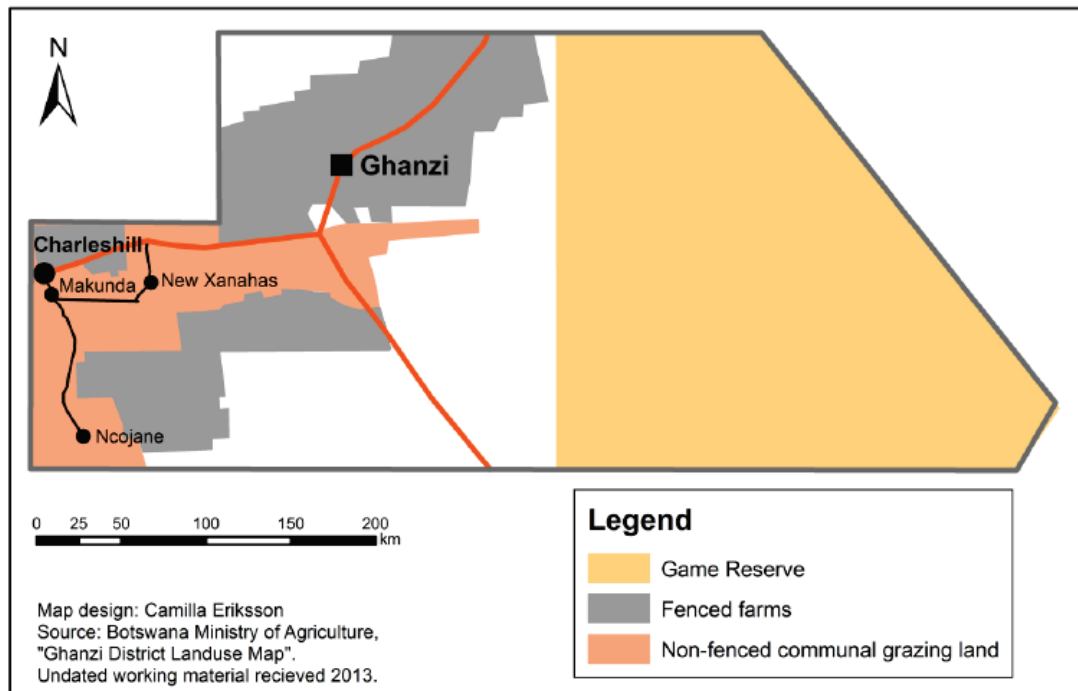
I started to gain some insight into the intricate meaning of cattle ownership and was intrigued by the differences and similarities I saw between both the cattle owners and their cattle operations in the way that different women engaged in the farming. Ghanzi District lies in the mid-west of the country and is home to a diversity of people from different ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds. It thus offered the possibility to explore how gendered relations to cattle intersect with ethnicity, race and class to shape how women might benefit from livestock production. The importance of the beef export trade to the European Union facilitated for inquiries around women's experiences of how commercialisation affects those possibilities. Ghanzi District, with its freehold Ghanzi Farms known for their export beef production, and the vast areas of communal land in Charleshill sub-district, proved to suit my purposes nicely. These were the reasons that I chose Ghanzi District as my primary study area.

### **Ghanzi District**

The town of Ghanzi is the administrative centre of Ghanzi District, and it is here that the main Division of Veterinary Services (DVS) offices, the Land Board, Department of Gender Affairs (GDA), and police station are located. It is also where Ghanzi Beef Farmers' Association (GBFA) meetings are held, where information is shared on new forms of implementations of regulations in the cattle sector, news from the DVS, the Cattle Farmers Union and BMC politics, disease outbreaks, and so on. Although the GBFA is open to all cattle farmers in Ghanzi District, there is also the Ovitori Cattle Farmers Association in Charleshill sub-district. However, it is not as active as the GBFA and did not have a single meeting between April and December 2013.

As the map below shows, a large part of Ghanzi District is made up by the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, where no farming activities are allowed. The administrative centre of the district is Ghanzi town, which is also where a larger selection of grocery stores, shops and hardware stores is found. All around Ghanzi town is the Ghanzi Farms Block, commonly called the 'Ghanzi Farms' with its fenced-off farms on freehold land. Although these farms are demarcated on the official map as roughly the same size, in practice, a single farmer can own any number of the

demarcated farms, often adjacent, that together constitute a single cattle operation. Some of the largest fenced farms in the country that are found in the Ghanzi Farms, and measure over 100,000 ha.



Map of Ghanzi District.

The Ghanzi Farms are characterised by its Afrikaans and English speaking inhabitants, but there are also farmers and other inhabitants of other ethnicities, such as Nharo.

Charleshill sub-district is mainly inhabited by Batswana, Bakgalagadi, Herero and San people. Kent (2002) distinguishes between three overarching ‘cultures’ in the Kalahari region: the Bantu speaking people, the San and those of European descent. Within these loose cultural groupings, she sees the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero (all Bantu-speaking), as well as the English and Afrikaner as different ethnicities. These are also the main ethnic groups in Ghanzi District (Twyman 2001). While Twyman (2001) also mentions San to be a main ethnic group in Ghanzi, I will follow Chebanne (2008) and Barnard (1979) in considering San the overall cultural group and Nharo as an ethnic group within the San group. When I use the term Batswana (sing. Motswana) I refer to the ethnicity and not to Botswana citizenship.

Charleshill village is the administrative centre of Charleshill sub-district, some two hundred kilometres to the west of Ghanzi town and close to the Namibian border. There is a police station and a Division of Veterinary Services (DVS) office in Charleshill village, as well as a primary school



and a few stores around the market place. There are also areas with fenced leasehold farms in Charleshill sub-district, as discussed in chapter 4. Ncojane village, Makunda village and New Xanahas, which we shall visit throughout the thesis, are all situated in Charleshill sub district.

Ncojane is a village of around fifteen hundred people two hours drive south of Charleshill village. The inhabitants speak mainly different Setswana and Sekgalagadi dialects. With only a tuck shop – a small store for food and necessities, and a small DVS office where farmers can buy vaccines and medicines for their animals, the villagers go to Charleshill for larger purchases. Makunda village is situated half an hour's drive to the west of Charleshill village and has fewer than five hundred inhabitants. It is known as a Herero-speaking village and is greener than its surroundings due to its location in a watered valley that allows trees to grow tall. New Xanahas is a small village south of the road between Charleshill village and Ghanzi town and has been a settlement area for San people who were forced to move from other areas, as I shall come back to in chapter 4. Inhabited by over five hundred people, most of whom speak Nharo, it has a primary school but no DVS office.

Ghanzi is known to make up a large portion of the meat exported to the EU through the BMC. One of these farm plots is occupied by the Kentrek feedlot, an important operation to many farmers in Ghanzi District, as I shall discuss further in later chapters. From Ghanzi town to Lobatse where the BMC's export abattoir is situated is approximately six hundred and forty kilometres. A cattle truck can cover the distance in around ten hours today on the paved road, but before 1998 when the paved road was completed, the gravel road made it a challenging drive. Before cattle trucks became a transport option, cattle were trekked down 'on the hoof' – a journey that took several weeks.

Nestled in between the fenced farms on the Ghanzi Farms Block, around forty kilometres north east of Ghanzi town, is D'kar village. It has around two thousand San inhabitants of primarily the Nharo group. There is a small store, a car mechanic, a small restaurant that opens on request, a primary school, a cultural art centre, a history museum and a Christian Reformed Church. In the early 1990's what came to be called the Kuru Development Trust in 1986 started up literacy and language acquisition program including the preparation of a Nharo orthography and translation of the Bible into Nharo (Guenther 1999). D'kar is a hub for many of the Nharo speaking farm employees around Ghanzi Farms, and almost all of them have friends and relatives or other connections in D'kar.

## Setting up field work and conducting interviews

Arriving in Botswana for my main field season of eight months was an overwhelming experience. Once formalities and visits to the Immigration Office and the Ministry of Agriculture to explain the purpose of my research had been taken care of, and the necessary camping equipment acquired, I set out on the eight-hour drive from Gaborone to Ghanzi. As I planned to interview people from different social groups, I did not want to be too closely associated with any one farmer family or group, and had thus decided to rent a house of my own. Another reason for this was that I was going to have a translator living with me, something I shall return to below.

Shortly after installing myself in Ghanzi I was reminded of the non-predictable aspects of field research: my long-term rental four-wheel drive car broke down so often that in the end the local mechanic stopped charging me: “this one is on me – you’ll be back soon”, he said. In addition, the house I had arranged to live in turned out to be rented to someone else. I found a new place to rent in Ghanzi town, and I also bought a second hand vehicle, returning the unreliable rental.

Although I had a base in Ghanzi town, most of my days and nights were spent at cattle-posts or farmhouses, visiting cattle owners and cattle-hands. By chance, a house in Charleshill village administered by the Rural Administration Centre (RAC) also became available to me, and it served as my base when working in the Charleshill sub-district, a two and a half-hour drive from Ghanzi town. Not only did this give me an opportunity to regroup between my stays with cattle owners, but it also normalised my presence there, as I was seen as a resident rather than a visitor.

### **Selecting informants for interviews and *kraals* for participant observation**

To select informants for formal interviews and *kraals* for participant observation, I combined two approaches. Firstly, I used both the contacts in Ghanzi that I had gotten from the BOTSFA meetings in Stockholm and those from the pilot field study, and from there gained new contacts. Secondly, when I met people at markets, cattle sales or elsewhere who seemed to fit into my selection criteria, which I outline below, I would steer the conversation towards my research and ask if they would be interested in participating. In this way, informants were chosen by purposive sampling, from which both people and cattle operations were chosen according to certain criteria (Guest et al. 2006).

The initial criteria that I used were: *location*, as I wanted to talk to people from Charleshill sub-district and the Ghanzi Farm Block, (‘Ghanzi Farms’); *sex*, focusing on women; and *self identified cattle ownership*. I

made sure to include women with different herd sizes and ages in both groups, and to note land tenure, cattle breed and marital status. These criteria assured that I got to talk to women involved in cattle production that was carried out in different circumstances. I relied on approximate herd size numbers that cattle owners gave me, and when I visited the herds I would note the size of the herd size myself. In a study on the determinants of profit efficiency among smallholder beef producers in Botswana Bahta and Baker (2015) found variation between farms with more or less than ten and twenty head of cattle. Solway (1988) notes a difference in potential for commercial production between farms with more or less than fifty cattle among the cattle farmers studied. However, she notes that the number takes into account the need for draught animals, a practice with less importance today. Since a considerable number of farmers in Ghanzi have larger herds, I added two more categories of larger herds to be able to differentiate them further, creating five categories of the intervals: 1-10, 11-20, 21-50, 51-200, >200. When noting herd size I thus recorded if the owner had more or less than ten, twenty, fifty and two hundred cattle. In my sample of the forty women chosen for core interviews five had very small herds, nine had small herds, eleven had medium herds, four had large herds and eleven had very large herds.

In line with the overall approach of the study, I used an interpretative and investigative logic aimed at, in Jennifer Mason's (in her 'expert response' included in Baker and Edwards 2012: 5) terms, an analytical narrative exploring processes in their richness, complexity and detail, promoting the understanding of the contingency of different contexts. The informants are thus not seen as representatives of their respective group, rather the aim is to explore themes that across various contexts and circumstances, as described by the informants themselves. This approach allowed me to explore the meaning of different women's cattle ownership within the same broader political, economic and socio-cultural contexts located within the beef industry in Botswana. As such, I focused on different social groups in order to investigate inequalities of property relations along multiple dimensions (McCall 2005). I am thus interested in explaining relations of difference among already constituted social groups constructed through for example ethnicity or class.

### **Interviews**

I focused on women who were self-identified cattle owners in Charleshill sub-district and on the Ghanzi Farms. A complexity around women's positions in relation to cattle emerged as cattle production was talked about

by farmers in Ghanzi as relating to three loosely identified ‘traditions’ of cattle practices: the ‘English and Afrikaner, the ‘Herero’ and the ‘Batswana and Bakgalagadi’. I thus decided to interview women from these three groups.

Guest et al. (2006) found in their methodological experiment that thematic saturation when interviewing relatively homogenous groups (such as, in their case, women with the same profession from West African cities) was usually reached at six interviews, and with more heterogeneous group saturation was reached within twelve interviews. In order to be able to say if two or more groups differ in a certain aspect, they propose twelve participants per group. Although the aim with thematic saturation is to reach a point where new themes are no longer appearing from further interviews, I used this guideline for planning purposes. I set out to interview twelve women within each of the three groups mentioned above. I included one extra woman in the Batswana and Bakgalagadi group as her land tenure differed from other women in that group, as I discuss in chapter 5.

Notably, during the later half of my field work, I had yet not encountered any Nharo women cattle owners. As I realised that it might be a matter of visibility and constituted a limitation of my study, I went about to locate them and included three interviews in my sample. While time limitations prevented me from collecting more data from this group, which constitutes a limitation of my data, I chose to include these three women in my sample so as to broaden my understanding of how situations under which women farm cattle in Ghanzi District might vary. In total I interviewed forty women who identified themselves as cattle owners from six different ethnic groups and with different herd sizes. These women will be introduced in detail throughout the coming chapters.

*Table 1. Herd sizes according to ethnicity.*

	Very small herd	Small herd	Medium herd	Large herd	Very Large herd	Total
Afrikaner	1	0	1	1	5	8
English	0	0	0	1	3	4
Tswana	0	3	1	1	0	5
Kgalagadi	1	3	1	2	1	8
Herero	1	3	5	1	2	12
Nharo	2	1	0	0	0	3
Total	5	10	8	6	11	40

Whereas the interviews during the pilot study were explorative with a wide scope, the interviews of the forty women in Ghanzi District conducted during the main field season all focused on what it meant for them to have cattle, how they made use of them and how they perceived changes in gender relations and cattle production. The interviews focused on the interviewee's view of their situation, the challenges they faced, and the opportunities they could see or hope for in relation to cattle and gender relations. Interview themes included what kind of cattle related work they participated in, what kind of cattle ownership and control over cattle and cattle assets they had, how their cattle ownership and work influenced their relations to other people and what changes in cattle practices and ownership they perceived, gendered and otherwise. If commercialisation did not come up, I would ask specifically about changes related to this topic. An interview guide was used to make sure that the relevant topics were covered by all informants (Bernard 2011).

These forty interviewed cattle-owning women around Ghanzi District are my primary informants. The cattle referred to are thus primarily cattle owned by these women, although I also spent time with cattle on other farms when opportunity arose to engage in key activities related to commercial beef production. These cattle are part of the network of Ghanzi cattle production in different ways, primarily in social exchanges and in the beef commodity chain. None of the cattle I met through these forty women were involved in commercial milk production, although many were milked for subsistence use.

However, I started the fieldwork with a few weeks participant observation among employed cattle-hands (commonly called 'herd boys' in English, or *badisa* in Setswana) who worked on larger farms, in order to get a basic idea of what was involved in every-day cattle work on the Ghanzi Farms. Moreover, in accordance with Harding's (1993) standpoint theory, doing so would provide me with a qualitatively different description of the reality of cattle production and its meaning than if I had started doing my field work among those who are seen as the norm. These Nharo employees and their families were positioned on the lower end of the socio-economic scale. Gaining insight into their perspective of Ghanzi cattle production before approaching that of the more affluent or dominant groups of cattle farmers allowed me to explore power relations from a low status point of view (Harding 1993).

## Translation and translators

As I do not speak the various local languages spoken in Ghanzi District, apart from English, I worked with translators for most of the duration of the field study, unless the informants themselves were comfortable in English. Ditiro, a local Nharo-speaking man from D'kar, travelled with me to the farms to translate conversations and interviews with the Nharo-speaking cattle workers on the Afrikaner owned farms as well as the Nharo women cattle owners. Ditiro, also translated conversations that were conducted in Herero, Afrikaans and Setswana. He would camp out with me, and stay with me in the house in Charlehill, but go home to his own house in D'kar when I went back to the house in Ghanzi to write.

After a translator workshop I organised together with my assistant supervisor Dr. Selolwane from the University of Botswana where we practiced translating interviews and discussed the importance of gendered terms in translation, I also engaged Thato. Thato was at that time a bachelor student at the University of Botswana, and a young Motswana woman from outside Francistown. Fluent in English and Setswana, Thato came with me to Ghanzi to translate conversations and interviews with women in Setswana. We lived together in the house that I rented and went together to camp out at homesteads and cattle *kraals* to conduct participant observations and interviews together. Further, a week was spent together with both Thato and Ditiro present at interviews, taking turns to translate, and talking afterwards about how it went. As Ditiro did not attend the workshop on translation that Thato was part of, we discussed our experiences together, making sure we all had the same understanding of how to translate and why. In this way, we attempted to minimise loss of information and misinterpretation during translations.

Each evening I would make sure to spend time alone with the translators in order to discuss the interviews and observations, for debriefing, and in order to discuss the data, and make sure that I had understood the translations properly. Thato also transcribed five of the twenty-four interviews made with those women who did not speak English, word by word, including both English and Setswana sequences. I sent random samples of extracts from two different interview transcriptions from taped interviews to an English and Setswana speaker to get a second opinion of the translation. She did her own translations to English from the Setswana sequences and although there were times where there were slight variations in the exact words used, she underlined that Thato's translations were impeccable. Similarly one of the interviews where Ditiro helped me to translate between Nharo and English were transcribed word by word,

including both English and Nharo sequences, by a student at the Nharo language centre in D'kar, who found the translation satisfactory.

## **Participant observation and key informants**

To understand women cattle owners' various experiences of the Ghanzi beef industry in relation to their social positions and material welfare, I took into consideration political and commercial forces, as well as social and economic relations to cattle. By participating in and observing the everyday life and cattle related activities of women cattle owners, as well as other cattle operations, increased my understanding Ghanzi cattle production from the point of view of their individual situations in this network. In practice, this meant that I spent time with people living and farming in different contexts instead of focusing on getting to know people in one particular village or farm in greater depth.

Prioritising spending time at cattle operations and with cattle-owning women from different social groups allowed me to get a better idea of what cattle farming entails in all its aspects. However, it also meant that I spent less time getting to know village dynamics and other aspects of my informants' lives. If I had hung around the same village for months on end, I would have gained access to different material and would have had a deeper knowledge of that particular setting. Instead, I chose to include people rooted in different places, histories and social settings. Although the trade-off was less familiarity with each place and setting, this approach gave me a more nuanced picture of Ghanzi cattle production from the perspective of different women cattle owners.

## **Participating in cattle work, daily chores and meetings**

I chose to conduct participant observation in order to gain an understanding of what the lives of the cattle owners are like, what challenges and opportunities they face, how they tackle them and how they experience the various contexts in which their daily lives take place. This method also allowed me to study the interaction between people, how different people relate to the same person, situation or information, and to observe discrepancies between ideas and practice that could not be captured in an interview. The scale of participation in an observation used by Adler and Adler (1994) stretches from complete-member-researcher through active-member researcher, and to the peripheral-member-researcher. On this scale I would situate myself in the middle, as an active-member researcher, and thus as a participating observer rather than an observing participant or an

observer only (Adler and Adler 1994, Bernard 2011). This position also varied from situation to situation, and with time, depending on my familiarity with the task at hand and the language others used to communicate around me.

In practice this meant that I went to stay with people on their farms and took part in their daily tasks as much as was possible and was appropriate. Although it was not possible to visit the cattle of all the women I interviewed, I could spend several days on numerous occasions with some. Some were not visiting their cattle in the near future and so could not invite me to join them, and some had their cattle at someone else's farm. On the other hand I visited cattle herds belonging to people other than the forty women, and after spending months around cattle and cattle farmers, I gained a basic and general understanding of the usual types of work and activities that go on around the animals. This meant, for example, that when I interviewed those women who themselves rarely visited their cattle, I did not feel the need to ask for extra trips for my sake, as I could follow and understand their descriptions. However, I made sure to participate in and observe at different farms the main cattle-related events that my informants talked about, such as branding, castrating, vaccinating, watering, herding and cattle sales both in Charleshill sub-district and on the Ghanzi Farms.

When I was invited to stay in a guest room at the farm house, I did, and where there was no such house, or the house was very small, or where the people I visited slept outside, I slept in a tent. I would share meals with my hosts, often combining our food and cooking together, and when they had no or little food, I provided food for all of us.

Aiming at getting an overall view of what cattle production entails in Ghanzi I would spend time participating in the cattle work even when it was the husbands who supervised and/or participating in the cattle work, or, as discussed above, when only employed cattle-hands were present. I would also spend days with the women cattle owners who did not participate in cattle work and instead spent their time around the house or in the village.

### **Other key informants**

In addition to the forty women cattle owners in focus, informant interviews were carried out with people in key positions in the area or in the cattle industry, both locally and nationally, such as staff at the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaborone, the Division of Veterinary Services in Ghanzi and Charleshill, village chiefs and elders, and those with positions in Farmers' Associations. Further, I sought out people who were pointed out to me by cattle farmers as key people, places or activities with significance for the



understanding of local cattle production network, such as influential cattle farmers or those who had been around for a long time. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with men and women in the study area. While carrying out participant observation on farms, as well as during the Ghanzi Beef Farmers Association meeting, cattle markets, dinners and parties, I came into contact with a variety of people and situations that, although not part of the formal focus, provided me with deeper understanding of processes and points of references that were relevant for the meetings that I had with my informants.

### **Being part of the research**

Apart from my general positionality as a young, white, female, Swedish academic, my interest in gender relations and cattle production led me to encounter certain people, animals and situations, and to see in these situations certain aspects rather than others. In addition, the information made available to me through interaction with other individuals would be affected by how those individuals placed me in their world. My looks, clothes, language and the sheer possibility of being able to travel to Botswana to conduct a field study placed me differently in terms of socio-economics, class, and culture from many of my informants, although some placed me further away from themselves than others did. I learnt to be careful to point out that I was not here to judge anybody, was not sent to see if they followed various regulations, and was not in a position to help them personally. Although I always made sure to carry gifts of tea and sugar, or something of the sort, as a symbol of appreciation for their time and hospitality, I was clearly asking my informants to help me in my research without promising much in return. When appropriate I would help out with firewood collection, washing dishes or transporting things, in addition to cattle related chores.

In order to demonstrate my real interest in their activities and thoughts, as well as to gain their trust as someone who took them seriously, I made sure to participate in and help out with as many daily tasks as possible, including hands-on cattle work, such as watering, sorting, herding, milking, vaccinating and castrating. Generally my impression was that I was welcomed and that most informants talked to me openly and without hesitation. However, I realised that I was restricted in not knowing the local languages, which limited what I could learn in some situations.

This also meant that I could get a more nuanced understanding of English speaking informants perspectives and that I could pick up more information in English speaking settings. Although some women from each

of the three groups formed around ‘traditions’ of cattle practices outlined in a previous section spoke English, *all* of the ‘white’ women I interviewed spoke English. Further, activities related to commercial production were easier to plan ahead on the Ghanzi Farms, so many of these activities I observed and participated in there. In addition, practicalities and dynamics around the women’s cattle related activities and practical possibilities of including me varied. Thus, overall I gained a more nuanced understanding of some women’s perspectives than others. In terms of groups, I got better acquainted with the ‘white’ women, both English and Afrikaner, and Batswana and Bakgalagadi women, than the Nharo and Herero women cattle owners due to language.

I was aware of the asymmetry in my relations in the field. Especially coming from a university in a high-income European country, perhaps, to explore practices and relations in a country with a colonial past, and among people of which some are differently situated in terms of economic and material and possibilities, placed me in a social grid that I became actively aware of, and worked to address with respect. Although it would always be obvious that I lived and worked in Ghanzi under other premises than the cattle farmers I met, my intention was to bridge the differences and try to understand other knowledges, acknowledging the partiality and situatedness of my own and local knowledge claims (Haraway 1988). Spending time together with cattle farmers, participating in daily chores and cattle activities helped me to be able to speak and interact with the men and women in ways that they might take me seriously.

On a practical note, an interesting consequence of having to change cars was that I could note a difference in people’s attitudes towards me when I showed up in a Toyota Hilux instead of the Land Rover Defender that I had first rented – apparently only tourists or Land Rover nerds drive Land Rovers in the Kalahari desert, and it was clear that I was not a Land Rover nerd. The number of Land Rover jokes I heard in Ghanzi was about the same as the number of ‘dumb blond jokes’ one might hear in Sweden. Although my second car placed me closer to being someone who belonged in Ghanzi, it also clearly placed me as someone who had resources - and this identified me as being closer to some of the people I interviewed than others. This was a trade-off I had to live with, as there was no communal transport to the places I was heading, and hitching rides was not an option because of time limitations.

### **Ethical considerations**

When interviewing informants, the aim and background of my study was explained to them beforehand and consent was sought before starting the interview. Similarly, when carrying out participant observation with a specific group, family or practitioner, I would make sure that they understood the purpose of my visit and where I came from. However, as I moved around the field area a lot, I inevitably met and talked with people who did not know about my role as a researcher, and although no formal questions were asked, those situations inevitably contributed to my general understanding. As much as possible, I kept my notepad, camera and voice recorder visible so as to not to appear to be hiding my research identity. All the same, after a time of casual interaction and numerous visits, relationships change and my impression is that many informants stopped seeing me as a researcher *first*. Nevertheless, they did know my purpose and were constantly reminded of it by my never-ending stream of questions about cattle. Interviewees were asked if they wanted to be anonymous, and most of them did not. However, I made sure that any sensitive information or opinions are untraceable to any specific individual, and use pseudonyms for all names.

I only engaged in physical cattle work (for example herding on foot or on horseback, vaccinating, castrating or branding) when I was confident I would not inflict more discomfort on the animals than if someone else were to perform the tasks, and when I deemed it appropriate to participate in the activities. Gillen (2015) discusses the limits of appropriate activities during field work in relation to alcohol consumption and the social spaces it creates. In my case it was the participation in activities that either reinforced or disrupted inequalities of race or gender that concerned me most. By following the lead of the woman cattle owners I was visiting, I would sometimes get caught up in situations where it would be socially awkward towards my host and possibly devastating to my field work to object to racialization. For example, my Nharo translator Ditiro was expected to wait outside an Afrikaner cattle owner's house when I went in for tea, although they had previously shared a table at my house. Neither of them were prepared to challenge this habit, and I felt obliged to follow suit, making sure to discuss the situation at length afterwards with Ditiro. Although it provided me with a deeper understanding of the inequalities at play in Ghanzi, similar situations always made me uneasy.

Further, participating in activities deemed rare or even unfitting for women or whites or wealthier people, all categories I belonged in, I ran the risk of making people uncomfortable. However, taking part in the same

activities as my woman cattle owner host, regardless if I was perceived as different, usually made for a comfortable social setting after a little while, and not seldom with laughs at my expense. There were occasions when I was invited to a farm where the woman cattle owner did not participate in the hands on-cattle work, but I still wanted to understand what kind of cattle operation she had. I would then sometimes spend time with the husband, son or cattle-hands in order to get a thorough understanding of her cattle ownership. On one occasion I was seen as a threat by one of the woman cattle owner's daughter-in-law, but after spending some time with the family, we laughed at the initial tension.

## **Analysing the data**

The analysis of the data collected in the field aims at saying something about Ghanzi cattle production through exploring and explaining the experiences of women cattle owners in various situations and with a wide range of background. As such, the data does not allow for general statements about any particular group of people, but rather highlight the diversity of themes relevant to women cattle owners.

### **Analysing field notes and interviews from core informants**

Formal interviews were recorded when possible and later listened to numerous times. Where recording was not possible, detailed notes were taken. I transcribed the interviews from the audio recordings and the notes taken throughout the interviews (Kvale 2008). These texts were analysed thematically according to Malterud's (1998: 91) adaption of Giorgi's (1985) method of analysing qualitative data. First, the entire material is read through in order to get a general impression. Themes that stand out are noted. Once this is done, the material is systematically codified into categories that contain information about one or more of the themes previously identified. Sub-categories are organized where necessary. As expressed by Guest et al. (2006), themes emerge from the data whereas codes are applied to the data. Throughout the process, research questions are kept in mind while being sensitive to what the data can tell about these questions. In the last phase of the analysis, the pieces are put together again and the knowledge drawn out of them is summarised in a way that is reflected in the situation of the interviews.

The information that individual pieces of analysed text have yielded is then looked at in comparison to the context in which the data was gathered. Then, the original material is examined once again and re-read

systematically in order to validate and re-contextualise the final analysis in relation to the original material. Finally, a connection is made with the initial working idea and also with existing research, theory and literature.

A thematic analysis was also conducted with field notes of observations, informal interviews and conversations, based on Bernard's (2011) approach, where the material is scanned to get a sense of themes emerging, reshuffled, and explored according to the themes. I also paid attention to how this data strengthened, contradicted, nuanced or complicated the data from the core interviews. During the early stages of the data-collecting period I did a preliminary analysis of the data collected thus far, in order to find themes that could be further explored. Guest et al. (2006) found that already after few interviews from a rather homogenous group the majority of the themes they detected had already been established.

### **Analysing key informant and pilot interviews**

Exploratory interviews from the pilot study and with male cattle owners were primarily used to determine the future route of the field-work. Key informant interviews were principally used to obtain specific information necessary to continue my field-work. However, any information that would suggested further themes to explore, contradictory pieces of information or new insights were used to further explore the data I had already collected, and ponder additional angles to a certain question. At the end of my field-work, data from key informant interviews were also used to triangulate information obtained from the interviews with the forty women cattle owners.



## 4 Cattle and Gender in Botswana

### Introduction

Political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of Botswana's cattle sector create a backdrop against which continual negotiations concerning women's possibilities to benefit from cattle become meaningful. In this chapter I discuss how relations between different groups of farmers in Botswana and their place in the cattle industry have emerged out of historical relations where cattle production has been a stage for inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, race and class. By looking at property relations as social relations between people (Sikor and Lund 2009), I examine how inequalities in property rights and access to grazing land and cattle tell us something about power relations defining women's ability to establish property claims and benefit from cattle ownership.

This chapter starts with an overview of the history of cattle production in Botswana, exploring how ethnicity, race and class have been produced and reproduced through relations to cattle. I show how such relations are integral to how people in Botswana have been situated in relation to cattle throughout history, in terms of access to technology, capital, market, labour, and authority and access to cattle and grazing land through social identity and via negotiations of other social relationships (Ribot and Peluso 2003). By analysing how race is constructed in social relations within struggles for natural resources (Mollet 2006) and through the environment (Sundberg 2008), I show how dynamics of Tswana cattle practices merged with colonial market structures in ways that racialized access to land and cattle. I discuss how class relations formed out of unequal access to land, water, cattle and labour (Parson 1981, Bolt and Hillbom 2013a) created a

stratification of society (Ortner 2006) where certain expressions of ethnicity and racialisation are linked to social ranking, reproducing inequalities.

The second section goes on to trace the history of commercialisation and introducing the different cattle production systems of today. I discuss how the beef export to the EU, accounting for fifty-five per cent of Botswana's meat export (GoB 2013), has consequences for property relations to cattle with its focus on individual ownership and sale. The third section deals with gendered cattle relations where I discuss women's participation in cattle production as depicted in the literature as well as how possibilities for women's *de jure* property rights have changed. I show how men's almost exclusive association with the cattle (Hovorka 2012) has been important in mediating gender relations through property claims to cattle. I also discuss how the government's gender equality efforts might give a base to stand on for challenging the privileging of men in the country's cattle sector. I show how relations of ethnicity, race and class also intersect with gender and how different women are positioned differently in terms of property relations and access to cattle assets. The concluding section highlights the importance of paying attention to intersecting power dynamics when understanding property relations to cattle in Botswana today.

## Botswana's cattle history

Cattle farming has been the backbone for Botswana society and, before the discovery of diamonds in 1967, of the country's economy (Gulbrandsen 2012). Cattle have historically been of great social importance in Botswana, and still are for a large part of the population (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953), Gulbrandsen 2012, Schapera 1938). The importance of cattle is not limited to Botswana, and the 'cattle complex' (Herskovits 1926), which identifies those societies in which cattle constitute a central meaning in life, has been prevalent in a number of societies in Africa. This cattle complex, Herskovits (1926) suggested, is to be found among all Bantu speaking cattle-oriented groups, under which the Setswana, Sekgalagadi and Herero speaking groups are classified. While women do most of the work with the crops in societies characterised by the cattle complex, Herskovits (1926) noted, the prestige system based on cattle ownership is limited to men. Characterising the 'Southern Bantu Cattle Complex' (Kuper 1982) more specific to the southern parts of Africa, is a general opposition between male pastoralism and female agriculture, in which cattle are associated with men, and the direct exchange of women and children for cattle through bride wealth is central.



In Botswana the importance of cattle for social life has been noted not only for the Tswana (Schapera 1938, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953)) but also for other groups. The Herero (Vivelo 1977, Henrichsen 2013, April et al. 2014) and the Kgalagadi (Kuper 1970, Solway 1988, Solway et al. 1990) are also commonly depicted as cattle pastoralists, or agro-pastoralists where wealth, social and political standing and prestige are linked to cattle. Gulbrandsen (2012: 117) points out how the English colonial and post-colonial elite shared the ‘obsession’ for cattle with the Batswana. Russell and Russell (1979: 17) note that the early Afrikaner settlers of Ghanzi “regarded cattle as social wealth, not in the pecuniary sense of commercial economy but as the proper social foundation underpinning family and community life”. Guenther (2015: 134) describes these settlers in Ghanzi as ‘western pastoralists’, that were “a far cry from land-hungry, market oriented Western ranchers”, making explicit reference to the ‘cattle complex’ (ibid.: 154).

The common interest in cattle by the elites and the decision makers from different ethnicities was the major and necessary condition, in Gulbrandsen’s (2012) terms, for the formation of a coherent postcolonial ruling group. The elite groups who might apply different symbolic, political and economic value to cattle were able to downplay differences of interest because they shared a common interest in developing a flourishing cattle sector. The political and economic Tswana elite who were heavily involved in the cattle sector had a strong hold on the state and incentives to promote rational state institutions and private property rights (Hillbom 2014). Local and European elites both had an interest in consolidating their power in the post-independent state, and were able to take control of key resources, including land, whilst at the same time acknowledging and incorporating traditional institutions (Gulbrandsen 2012, Taylor 2012). The Tswana cattle farmers who made up the numerical majority in the country were not nomads, but lived in smaller and larger villages, contributing to the development of a relatively democratic and accountable political system, facilitating the development of a commercial beef production (Hillbom 2014).

Today, although Botswana is classified as an ‘upper middle income country’ (Taylor 2012) it is still one of the most unequal countries in the world (Hillbom 2014) and livestock holdings are skewed with large inequalities between farmers (Darkoh and Mbaiwa 2002). Contemporary inequalities and cattle practices have been influenced both by early Batswana patron-client relationships around cattle, the *mafisa* system (Hillbom 2014) discussed below, as well as by the capitalist transformation brought about by the increasing importance of trade relations with South

Africa and Europe (Solway 1988, Darkoh and Mbaiwa 2002, Gulbrandsen 2012, GoB 2013). Women's property rights to cattle in Botswana have been limited throughout history. However, property relations to cattle have also been structured by colonial history of ethnicity, race and class, the substantial commercialisation efforts of both the colonial and post-colonial governments that merged with longstanding history of unequal cattle relations, to which I now turn.

### **Longstanding history of unequal cattle relations**

Cattle rearing within the *mafisa*-system was based on communal grazing lands where cattle owned by patrons were distributed among cattle-less clients or relatives on a long-term basis. A bundle of rights (Meinzen-Dick et al. 1997) to cattle assets would give clients access to milk, draught power and sometimes offspring, but did not include the right to slaughter or sell the animals. In Ribot and Peluso's (2003) terms, clients would gain access through these patron-client like arrangements, maintain access to these resources by upholding agreements of cattle care, whereas cattle owners had the power to control clients' access to cattle assets. These arrangements create longstanding social bonds that assured the cattle owners both labour and political loyalty, and also worked to minimise the risks of cattle loss in the event of drought or disease (Schapera 1994). While clients enjoyed some benefits from the cattle they tended through for example access to milk, and be able to maintain that access by upholding cattle work agreements, they did not have control, in Ribot and Peluso's (2003) words, as the access and property relations did generally not include the right to sell animals. Cattle ownership and control was thus the basis for class formations reflecting economic wealth, political power, and social status in Tswana society.

As Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, benefitting from resources can be dependent on access through social identity. In Ghanzi, ethnicity and race are important signifiers for social identity. When Setswana speaking people entered present day Botswana in the mid-1700s, the indigenous land tenure and economic production of the Kgalagadi and the San people already living there was slowly disrupted. Some of the indigenous San, including the Nharo, became commodity producers by hunting for ivory and feathers for the mercantile trade. Some Bakgalagadi pastoralists became labourers in the form of cattle herders for the Tswana elites (Solway 1988, Guenther 2015). Unequal labour relations developed, and Morton (1998) argues that slavery became increasingly common after the 1950s. However, the accumulation of cattle increasingly distinguished the Bakgalagadi from the

San and by the 1940s agro-pastoralism was established and with the acquisition of ploughs and the adaption of new well digging techniques the Bakgalagadi expanded their livestock production (Solway et al. 1990). By the mid-1900s the San and the Bakgalagadi were characterised as two distinct socio-economic strata in Botswana, and in the 1970s a majority of Ghanzi District councillors were Bakgalagadi, while few San held posts of political significance (Hitchcock 2002).

Herero speaking people came travelling across the border into Ghanzi from South West Africa - the area that is today Namibia - after their defeated uprising against the German government in 1904. Although some Herero speaking people already lived in the area, according to the census a large portion of the 6000-9000 Herero who were living in Botswana in the 1970s, were probably related to these refugees (Vivelo 1977, Lindholm 2006). Whereas the Herero gained a reputation as skilful cattle herders, San acquired a negative ethnic and racialized connotation, that referred to a wild, uncontrollable 'nature', and placed at the bottom of the social scales of both ethnicity and class (Wilmsen and Vossen 1990) that extend throughout the larger Kalahari region (Sylvain 2001). Although it has been shown that the San reared cattle before contact with the Bantu pastoralists (Wilmsen 1989, Lindholm 2006), they are often pictured as being an unchanged, leaderless, property-less and harmonious people of the bush (Thapelo 2003, Sylvain 2005).

Today the San are often described by other farmers in Ghanzi as former hunter-gatherers with no specific cattle history, framing appropriate relations to the environment in terms of race (cf. Sundberg 2008) as I shall discuss further in chapter 5. As with the natural resource struggles that Mollet (2006) explores in Honduras, such an essentialist picture of the San offers motivation for reproducing certain persons as belonging to a race with a historical lack of interest in cattle. Thus, racialization, by assigning different values to constructed cultural, phenotypical, and biological characteristics (Mollett 2006), has thus placed groups of people in unequal positions in relation to claims to property. As relations between groups became increasingly asymmetrical, class relations formed (Solway 1988, Guenther 2015). Class and race thus intersected in a way that increased the effects of subordination (Mollett and Faria 2013). Claims to property and access to resources are thus distributed along racial lines while power relations behind unequal distribution of cattle are masked. Land and water were communal resources in the Tswana polities or *merafe*, or tribe, and managed by the chief, or *kgosi*.

Whereas land was abundant, water was the main factor limiting both crop production and cattle farming. When male heads of households were

granted user rights of these resources they could combine private user rights to communally owned resources to gain *de facto* private ownership over houses, water points and cattle (Hillbom 2014). As Ribot and Peluso (2003) point out, access to resources dependent on socio-political context where different groups gain, maintain and control different resources to varying degrees. These ethnic differentiations, interlinked with racialization, were further aggravated by colonial relations, increasing the gaps between groups (Wilmsen and Vossen 1990).

### **Colonial developments with implications for ethnicity, race and class**

The main challenge for expanding the cattle sector in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, created under British rule in 1885, was access to water, and bore hole drilling schemes became the focus of colonial efforts before World War II. Bore holes were placed under the control of Tswana elite who were considered to have the best opportunities to run and maintain them (Bolt and Hillbom 2013b, Hillbom 2014). Also, initiatives from Tswana groups placed control of water sources in the hands of relatively influential and wealthy members of society (Peters 1984, Bolt and Hillbom 2013b). Further, elites of European descent were also given control over bore holes, as I discuss below. With an increasingly unequal distribution of water resources, that indirectly allowed for control of grazing land, cattle ownership became more and more polarized (Hillbom 2010, 2014, Bolt and Hillbom 2013b).

Outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in the 1930's and 1960's strengthened this effect, as small and medium size herds were harder hit by losses than larger herds were. Further, the increase in cattle prices allowed large scale cattle farmers who could take cattle from their herds without losing herd productivity to gain substantial income from their livestock husbandry, creating even larger inequalities (Bolt and Hillbom 2013b). In the early 1980's thirty per cent of rural households had no cattle, and thirty per cent of the national herd of 2.5 million head, was owned by four per cent of the households, privileging the Tswana elite (Hillbom 2014).

As Afrikaner and English cattle farms were established on what was San (including Nharo) hunting grounds in Ghanzi District, these groups were dispossessed and some ended up working on the Ghanzi Farms (Russell 1976, Russell and Russell 1979, Guenther 2015). Access to land, water and labour were in this way made readily available to settlers with European descent. Although the farms were initially placed with plenty of space apart, some of the pans and waterholes along which the farms were surveyed had been central points for the San who lived in the area

(Guenther 2015). In 1957 farms were surveyed and converted to freehold tenure with compulsory fencing, creating the Ghanzi Farms (Russell 1976). The San, who had until then shared the land with the cattle owners peacefully, became 'squatters' on their own lands. Gaining, maintaining and controlling access (Ribot and Peluso 2003) to water and land became crucial, and while settlers gained access to grazing land and the possibilities to maintain and control it, the San lost their access to the land and water they had been using, growing increasingly dependent on the Afrikaner (Russell 1976, Solway et al. 1990, Twyman 2001). Racial structures thus became constructed within property claims (Mollett 2006) where distinction between groups were maintained through who was considered to have legitimate claims to land and water. The authority to justify property claims and access to natural resources came to lie with the settlers and the colonial government, strengthened by the visual markers of fences, recognised as property boundaries by them. Whereas San property relations to land had been framed in terms of 'knowing' the land and never claimed 'ownership' of it in ways that would have been recognised by the colonial government, European property relations to land that gained authority were based on exclusive access and use of resources (Twyman 2001).

When the surface water of Ghanzi that had attracted both Afrikaner and San declined, the Afrikaners' skills at sinking wells put them at an economic advantage. At the same time they were dependent on the labour provided by the San. The arrangement between the Afrikaner cattle owner and the San worker in the 1960's have been described by the then Ghanzi District commissioner Silbauer (1965) as a patron-client relationship similar to that between the Tswana and the San, where the patron lived under material living conditions not much higher than the client. Guenther (2015) suggests that these early relations can be thought about as 'racial paternalism' charged with inequality but also emotion and morals. He even uses the word 'symbiotic' to describe the relation forged out of what he sees as the similar lifestyles and economic organisation of the early Afrikaner Trekkboers and the San (Silbauer 1965). Russell (1976: 187) writes that "[i]t would be mistaken to see the confrontation of Bushman and Afrikaner in Ghanzi as between native and colonizer. Although the Afrikaners had come to settle, they were highly atypical of white colonizers; they were to a considerable degree indigenous rather than outsiders and they had already evolved a lifestyle which had as much in common with African as with European social organisation".

The Ghanzi settlers soon became dependant on the San, and Guenther (2015) argues that the 'usefulness' that the settlers saw in the San was what

led to racial paternalism instead of the driving the San off the land or committing genocide as was carried out elsewhere in Southern Africa, where Afrikaners, often called Boers (meaning ‘farmers’ in Afrikaans), have been depicted typically as violent towards indigenous populations (Comaroff 1997). The San, in turn, became dependent on the Boer for water, as their farms included most of the water pans and wells. In addition, the Boers mastered the skill of sinking wells that would supply water even in dry years. As the second generation of settlers took over the farms, Guenther (2015: 139) writes, the cattle component of the Afrikaner economy had significantly increased, as had the more settled labour lifestyle of the San.

While the Nharo labourers initially worked mostly with small stock, the development of the cream industry by the Ghanzi farmers in the 1930’s, their labour became more intense and also shifted into more permanent forms (Guenther 2015). In the middle of the twentieth century wages started to replace food rations, clothes and medicine as payment, and Guenther notes how the earlier rations had led to closer bonds than wages did, as wages are less personal. A minimum wage was introduced by the government in the 1970s, and this, together with increasing economic pressure and a higher demand for skilled rather than unskilled labour, led to more strained relations between worker and employer (Guenther 2015).

With this, the labourers moved from the centre to the periphery of the Afrikaner social and moral community, and underemployment led to poverty and deprivation. The Afrikaans speaking group in Ghanzi has abandoned a lifestyle based on living off the land as hunters and gatherers, and today live mainly from cattle farming on freehold land, whilst some also have feedlots, shops, butcheries and game farms. Sylvain (2001) who writes on the relations between San workers and Afrikaner land owners in the Namibian part of the Kalahari, recounts a strict racial social structure consigning the Ju/’hoansi at the bottom of a steep class hierarchy of a patriarchal system that did not afford them proper adult status, where gender relations placed women in an even more dependant and subordinate position.

Just after the recession years in the early 1930s, the South African mining boom led to an increased demand for beef to feed the mine workers, and to meet this need the country turned to the Bechuanaland cattle exporters. As South Africa had put in place a weight restriction on imported cattle a in the mid-1920s in order to protect their domestic market, only farmers with the means to fatten their cattle could reach the required lower limit of 1000lbs for oxen and 750lbs (350kg) for cows (GoB 2013). Less wealthy farmers, notably not of European descent, without the means to buy heavier exotic

breeds, buy feed for their cattle or private property rights to land allowing them to put up fences for grazing management struggled to raise cattle heavy enough for the South African market. In addition, a hundred dollar yearly licence was required in order to export beef to South Africa. These restrictions meant that small-scale farmers in Bechuanaland had no chance in the export competition, as they did not have the means to fatten their cattle that moreover were often the small sized Tswana breed. Access to capital and technology thus mediated access to the market in a way that took on a racialised character, reinforcing class relations between groups.

To accommodate the export demands, European settlers with access to fenced land were encouraged by the colonial government to buy cattle from Batswana farmers on communal land, to fatten them and then sell them to South Africa (GoB 2013). In practice these restrictions had racial implications as only the white population, mainly the Afrikaner, were in a position to satisfy these requirements (GoB 2013) strengthening links between race and class. Only few of the Batswana elite could compete (Mazonde 1994: 11). This led to an increase in the gap between the larger farms and the smallholders, which in turn led to further differentiation between ethnic groups. As such, access to the market as well as to the technology of exotic breeds to a large extent determined who were able to benefit from their cattle in monetary terms.

### **Developments of the beef export after independence**

After independence in 1966 Botswana received considerable aid from Britain and the EEC/EU to develop livestock production. While a stable cattle economy was beneficial to all cattle producers, it is clear that the national cattle politics supported by development programmes from Britain, the World Bank and the ECC/EU have given advantages to cattle farmers with larger herds, supporting large scale farmers with production enhancing support (Gulbrandsen 2012: 85f) such as favourable loans and financial support for drilling private boreholes (Mazonde 1994: 19, Gulbrandsen 2012: 116, 85f). Further, the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TLGP) of 1975 (GoB 1975) also favoured larger scale farmers.

The TGLP was put in place as a measure to support the sustained development of the cattle industry (Mazonde 1994: 17), providing better grazing control, better range management and increased productivity and commercial activity (GoB 1975 §20). The idea behind the Act was to relieve the grazing pressure on the communal lands by allocating fenced farms to cattle owners, and to encourage those owners to use the land allocated to them responsibly (GoB 1975, Frimpong 1995). With this act

communal tribal grazing lands were divided up into three different zones: commercial ranches, communal areas and areas reserved for those not able to get allocation in the commercial areas, including future generations (Frimpong 1995, Hillbom 2014). Ghanzi District was one of six districts where commercial zones, or ‘TGLP ranches’, were implemented. The user rights were allocated to farmers with herds of four hundred head of cattle or more, and based on a fifty-year lease for a land area averaging 6400 hectares, with the possibility to renew the lease for another fifty years (Frimpong 1995: 7). The required condition of owning a large herd in practice excluded smallholders. However, large cattle owners were sometimes able to claim dual rights, and profit from resources both on their private leasehold land and that of the communal grazing land around it, reinforcing class relations (Frimpong 1995, Hillbom 2014). Both the process of implementation (Odell 1980) the effectiveness of the TLGP ranches in mitigating overgrazing has been widely questioned.

## Cattle production systems in Botswana

In Botswana today, the different ways of managing cattle are often characterised in terms of three major forms of cattle production systems, classified according to their grazing patterns (Peters 1984, Kalabamu 2006 , Ransom 2011). There are fenced farms, often called ranches or commercial farms, which are characterised by their exclusive property rights to grazing land that are reinforced by fences. Such farms differ in size and user rights, depending on how and when they were legally formalised. There are also communal grazing areas, where the local Land Board, discussed below, allocates grazing rights on tribal land. The watering points on these communal grazing areas are commonly called ‘cattle posts’, and the keeping of cattle here is often referred to in every day talk as communal farming. However, the term cattle post is also sometimes used to depict a watering hole on a fenced farm. The third production system, at feedlots, is based on zero grazing, where stall-fed cattle are fattened before being sold to abattoirs. Cattle from all three systems are raised for commercial export, primarily to the EU and South Africa. Importantly, these different cattle production systems are historically linked through inequalities of gender, ethnicity, race and class and there are common assumptions connected with different cattle practices, as I discussed above.

In Botswana’s official national statistics there are two categories that are used to distinguish between types of cattle holdings: the ‘traditional sector’ and ‘commercial sector’ (GoB 2014), where ‘traditional sector’ refers to



cattle on communal grazing land. Government documents (MoA 2011, GoB 2013), and FAO reports (Burgess 2006) use these two terms to categorize farmers and farms and the terms ‘commercial farms’ and ‘fenced farms’ are used interchangeably (MoA 2011). The registration of cattle holdings to help certify that they fulfil the criteria for EU export have focused on fenced farms and feedlots (MoA 2011), and in daily speech ‘commercial farm’ to a certified fenced farm. Since the introduction of the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) ranches, as discussed above, tribal land has been divided up into fenced ‘commercial ranches’, and non-fenced ‘communal areas’ (GoB 1975). These terms indicate property relations to grazing land. However, this division says nothing about the amount or kind of commercial or subsistence activity that actually takes place on the farms. Although the term ‘communal farming’ is often used in daily speech, it refers to the practice of keeping cattle on communal grazing land. The farm itself (small paddocks, or *kraals*, and other structures, and most commonly the bore hole) and the cattle are owned individually, family owned or owned by a syndicate or company. Communal farming with shared herds and herding do exist (for example in northern Namibia (Bollig and Gewald 2000)) but is something quite different from maintaining separate, private herds on communal land.

Today, different land tenure possibilities for cattle farmers imply varying property rights to grazing land. Fenced grazing land can be either freehold or leasehold. Freehold land is privately owned and can be sold, rented out and inherited. Leasehold land is state land leased on long term basis. Such a lease can be bequeathed to the next generation, but not sold as private property. Leasehold farms on tribal land can be inherited but not sold, and grants the holder exclusive rights to all resources on the land, as well as the right to fence the perimeters. As discussed earlier, such farms have been allocated to owners of larger herds.

Tribal, or customary land is allocated in two ways: by customary land grants and leasehold land with exclusive grazing rights according to the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) discussed below. Customary land grants, granted by the local Land Board, permit usufruct rights, and while they are perpetual and inheritable, they cannot be sold or fenced (Kalabamu 2000). All adult citizens of Botswana are eligible to apply for access to tribal land. Non-fenced grazing land also includes village grazing areas in and around a village where cattle have access to communal watering points. Such land is usually used in Ghanzi District by farmers who are not able to have access to other grazing land, or for very small herds, as competition for grass and water is high and breeding and disease control is even harder

than on tribal land due to the proximity of herds. Freehold and leasehold farms are in Botswana commonly called ‘commercial’ farms, or ‘ranches’, whereas communal grazing areas are in everyday speech referred to as ‘communal farms’ or ‘traditional’ farming. The bundles of rights that people share for various land tenure arrangements thus differ, with more exclusive rights afforded to those with freehold land, and access to grazing land affects farmers’ abilities to accumulate and manage their cattle. Thus property rights to land have significance for class structures (Peters 2002). However, as Rose (1994) suggests, the content and relation of these rights is what makes property meaningful, and we shall see below how the rights to fence is of significance beyond assuring private rights to grass.

During the 1970s Rennie et al. (1977) reported that ninety-two per cent of Botswana’s cattle were managed under the communal grazing system, producing eighty-five per cent of exported beef. This is comparable to Ransom’s (2011) figure of just under eighty per cent for the last decade. In this respect, Ghanzi District stands out with only thirty-three per cent of its cattle grazing on communal land (GoB 2014). Although the national percentage of cattle on communal grazing land has decreased, they still make up a large majority of animals in the country (GoB 2014). Ghanzi is known for both its heavy involvement in beef export production. In Ghanzi District there are approximately 146,300 cattle grazing on communal grazing land (‘traditional sector’) and 115,400 cattle grazing on fenced farms (‘commercial sector’) of which 24,600 are on TGLP farms and 90,800 on freehold farms (MoA 2014).

The typical commercial farm possesses a large herd of exotic breed cattle, is engaged in commercial activity and is owned and run by either a member of the Tswana political elite or by Afrikaner or English men. The same stereotype suggests that the Tswana political elite often live in the city and visit the farm on weekends, while Afrikaans and English farmers live in houses on the farm (Guldbrandsen 2012). Cattle on these farms are often kept in separate paddocks, and moved between fenced areas depending on how the grass grows and according to a breeding plan. Cattle holdings on non-fenced communal grazing land, are associated with subsistence production most often run by Tswana farmers who own small herds of the indigenous ‘Tswana’ cattle breed (Ransom 2011). On these farms, the cattle are not hindered by fences, but can roam freely around the flat, sandy Kalahari grasslands. Since water is scarce, they tend to come back to the watering hole to drink, but there is no knowing beforehand when or how often any particular animal will come back. Feedlots do not accumulate herds but focus on fattening cattle for a fee, or buy young animals to fatten

and sell for a profit (Ransom 2011). Running a feedlot is a resource-intensive activity and is associated with wealthy Afrikaner or English families with extensive knowledge of the formal cattle sector and with ample contacts in the business. Feedlots are today central nodes in the network of cattle production in Botswana.

Referring to farmers on communal land, commercial farmers and feedlot owners, Ransom (2011: 434) suggests that “the three types of producers in Botswana advance differing norms, expectations, and worldviews that are linked in large part to their production systems”. In the next chapter I will discuss how this might be changing in Ghanzi. Although emphasising what are normally understood as ‘inherent’ differences between these three types of producers - feedlot, ‘communal’ and ‘commercial’ - in Botswana, Ransom also identifies the importance of differences in the means to access available resources that exist between smallholders and larger farmers.

Similarities between cattle farmers on communal land across Africa have also been used by Davies and Hatfield (2007) for example, to bring attention to the production possibilities available to farmers on communal land in Botswana, and to argue differences between ‘communal farmers’ or ‘pastoralists’ and ‘commercial farmers’ or ‘land owning ranchers’ (see also Mosalagae and Mogotsi 2013: 14). This categorizing of cattle farmers is also mirrored in policies, statistics and grey literature, such as for example the 2006 FAO Country/Pasture Resource Profile on Botswana (Burgess 2006). Burgess states in the report that in Botswana “[b]eef is produced in two distinct sectors: freehold land owners produce commercially, and the traditional sector which operates on communal land” (Burgess 2006: 22), thus distinguishing between freehold land owners and farmers with cattle on communal grazing land, coupling the first group to commercial production and the latter to the traditional sector, leaving an ambiguity around what kind of production they engage in.

Some scholars use instead distinctions between, on the one hand, ‘commercial’ and ‘subsistence’ farming, and on the other between ‘communal’ and ‘private’ grazing lands (Peters 2013), whilst the terms ‘communal’ as opposed to ‘commercial’ are still in use (Ransom 2011). The concepts discussed here have played an important role over many decades in efforts to understand the different dynamics of cattle production in Botswana, Southern Africa and the world (Burgess 2006: 20). The work done in attempting to define the differences between various groups of cattle producers and the different motivations for farming cattle is important in order to create knowledge and respect for different practices, preferences and challenges. However, the setting for cattle producers in Ghanzi and

Botswana is changing, and the picture of contemporary cattle farming is becoming increasingly complex, as I discuss in chapter 7.

### **Commercialisation of cattle production in Botswana**

Commercialisation in Botswana can be seen as two interlinked processes: firstly, being increasingly included in a monetary market economy, and secondly, the increased focus on selling cattle as commodities in that monetary market. Cattle have been sold in Botswana at least since the introduction of the Hut tax in 1899 that obligated all households in the Bechuanaland Protectorate to pay taxes in cash (Wilmsen and Vossen 1990: 20). Later, conscious efforts to commercialise cattle production were made by the colonial government and after the Second World War, the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC), a development finance institution owned by the British government, took measures to establish an export beef industry in Botswana (GoB 2013). As a result, the Lobatse abattoir was opened in 1954. (ibid.).

As cattle farming was integral to the Tswana economy during the British rule, it was an advantage for Bechuanaland Protectorate (Bolt and Hillbom 2013b, Hillbom 2014), and the development of the sector was welcomed by both local and colonial elites (Gulbrandsen 2012). The post-independence government of Botswana has put energy and money into increasing efficiency of beef production in the country (Gulbrandsen 2012). However, the abattoir could only be economically viable if it had a constant and adequate throughput of cattle, and so a monopoly was instituted by the government in order to secure a steady supply from farmers all over the country. In the negotiations with the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the CDC agreed to purchase all cattle offered to it at the Lobatse abattoir, to purchase only from licenced suppliers and to guarantee the same price that was being offered for live cattle in Johannesburg (often referred to as the 'Johannesburg Parity' (ibid.).

After independence in 1966 the abattoir was nationalised under the name of Botswana Meat Commission (BMC), and the board of this para-statal body came under direct control of the President. With its continued monopoly, the BMC was the only gateway to the high-price market of Britain and later the EU. These events laid the foundation for the dynamics of contemporary cattle production in Botswana, creating the overall structure that is still in place today. Prices continued to increase until the mid-1970s, but Botswana's privileged market access to Britain/EU has always been dependent on meeting the criteria for high meat quality, high hygiene standards, and acceptable veterinary conditions (GoB 2013). As

post-independence political leaders were to a significant degree cattle holders who profited from the existing beef export sector, it was in their interest to enhance the cattle economy (Hillbom 2014).

In 1975, Botswana signed a beef export treaty with the EU, granting them preferential access with significantly reduced duty rates on the import of beef to the EU market up to an agreed annual quota (Ransom 2011). Since independence, Europe has been the most important beef market for Botswana, followed by South Africa and has since then been dependent on adapting to the changing regulations of EU import policies such as increased demands on meat quality, disease control and sanitary standards (GoB 2013). The high price paid by EU when compared to the previous meat export market dominated by South Africa has also contributed to raised rural incomes and the alleviation of poverty (ibid). Additionally, the discovery of diamonds in 1967 started developments that in the mid-seventies were to mark the change from a cattle-led to a mining-led economy and the resultant higher level of prosperity for the country generally increased access to cash for Botswana citizens (Hillbom 2014). Although productivity in the cattle sector has been low and even stagnant since independence, the cattle population has continued to increase because of the important role it still plays for the just under forty per cent of Botswana's people living in rural areas (Hillbom 2014). Even though the market value of cattle became important, social values associated with the animals did not weaken, as I explore in chapter 7, but the two dimensions instead interacted to create specific meanings of property relations in a changing setting (Rankin 2003).

Botswana has not filled its quota to the EU over the last decades, and this has encouraged various actors, such as the government, the BMC, the recently established Botswana Cattle Producers Association, and development organisations (e. g. USAID, World Bank) to advocate increased efforts to stimulate meat production in the country (Ransom 2011). The BMC is still the only entity that is allowed to export beef, and today controls all three of the country's export abattoirs (ibid), of which the one located in Lobatse is the only one exporting to the European Union. While BMC also exports to other countries, mainly South Africa, and there is a national market that allows farmers to sell to local butcheries, feedlots and other farmers, the European market is the most important destination for non-canned beef and its import regulations defines the Botswana beef sector at large.

BMC became financially insolvent during the period between 2009 and 2012, leading to an investigation of the BMC and the Botswana cattle

industry by a special select parliamentary committee (GoB 2013). The reasons for this go beyond the scope of the present study, but it should be noted that how the situation is finally addressed might affect farmers in the future. As I shall discuss in later chapters, the farmers I met in Ghanzi frequently complained about the BMC, particularly a lack of opportunities to sell cattle, but it is unclear whether this is linked to the situation of the BMC or not. Whereas recent trends indicate a decline in beef farming productivity, climatic constraints such as lack of rainfall has reinforced the dominant position of cattle production in the agricultural sector (Bahta et al. 2015). Negotiations regarding Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) were finalized in July 2014, granting Botswana continued duty free preferential access to the EU beef market (European Commission 2014).

### **Consequences of EU trade**

Focus on rearing cattle for meat export has led to the adoption of traceability measures in accordance with EU regulations, as well as to rearing beef cattle that the BMC will buy for a good price. Agricultural policy in Botswana has since independence tended to favour the beef sub-sector, with a focus on disease control and the livestock traceability system (LITS), required for EU export (Bahta et al. 2015).

In 2009 the BMC introduced a new procurement scheme, promoting the governments drive to increase weaner and feedlot production announced in 2006, meant to secure a steady supply of young, heavy cattle to the BMC and the EU market (GoB 2013). This scheme encourages farmers without enough grazing to produce heavy weaners, to sell young lightweight cattle to feedlots – contracted by the BMC and others. Through the Direct Cattle Purchase (DCP), the BMC buys cattle at village *kraals* or directly on the farms if the amount of cattle is large enough. It also encourages feedlots to sell young heavy cattle to the BMC. Since 2009 when the government set out to encourage the expansion of ‘weaner production’ - the slaughtering of calves at the age when they are weaned from their mothers - the importance of feedlots has increased (Ransom 2011). The idea behind the initiative was to increase the efficiency of commercial cattle farming and to cater to the preferences of the European meat buyers who prefer the taste and texture of younger meat. The feedlot owners often import grains that are both used at the feedlot and sold to farmers. Putting newly weaned calves in feedlots where they are stall-fed grains, minerals, salt and other food, means that they generally grow more and faster than calves grazing on the *kraal* with varying access to water and grass, and who need to walk to find food. Thus

exotic, 'commercial' breeds that give a lot of milk and fast growing calves have become popular.

With the government's focus on EU export for beef production, sanitary measures and disease control are set to EU standards. Since the European Union's General Food Law came into force in 2002, traceability of beef products 'from farm to fork' is a necessity for export to the EU (GoB 2013). Traceability measures were introduced around the world as a response to outbreaks of Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and although there has never been any reported cases of BSE in Southern Africa, Botswana still needs to comply to the traceability measures. Although not everybody sells to the BMC, traceability regulations designed to ensure disease control affect all farmers.

While the BMC announces that eighty to eighty-five per cent of its cattle comes from communal areas and some fifteen to twenty per cent comes from commercial farms, they arrive through a very limited number of intermediaries such as feedlots and cattle agents (GoB 2013). Although only cattle from registered holdings are eligible for EU export, other cattle, such as those on communal grazing land, can be sold to certified holdings. There, cattle should be kept for a minimum of forty days at a separate grazing area, where they cannot mix with other cattle, before a movement permit is issued, and ninety days in a territory approved for EU export before dispatch to the BMC for EU export. This is commonly referred to as the '40/90 rule' (European Commission 2010). The traceability regulations mean in practice that cattle from communal grazing lands cannot be sold directly for EU export slaughter, as they would have to be fenced in for at least forty days before export slaughter.

Further, in order to meet the high standards of disease control necessary for export to the European Union, veterinary cordon fences have been built (Mbaiwa and Mbaiwa 2006). These divide the country into disease control areas of green, yellow and red zones, between which livestock movements are restricted. In this way, the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease carried by wild water buffaloes is meant to be kept in check. Ghanzi District is a 'green zone' and cattle grazing there can be slaughtered for EU export. To implement these regulations, all cattle have to be branded with their district number. In order to know exactly what farm each animal comes from, there are also ownership brands. If you hold a Botswana residency permit or have registered a company in the country, you can apply for your own cattle brand. At any cattle sale, the cattle have to be branded, and the owner must be present with the branding certificate – or someone must possess a signed letter of agreement from the owner together with a copy of a photo ID.

This means that while cattle from both communal grazing areas and from private fenced grazing land reach the BMC and the EU, it is today not possible for farmers on communal land to enforce EU traceability requirements themselves and they have to sell to the local market or middle hands such as feedlots. In order to comply with EU demands assuring traceability from birth to slaughter, the DVS was given the responsibility for controlling that the regulations are followed (European Commission 2010, MoA 2011). Failure of the DVS to uphold a system compliant with LITS related regulations caused suspension of export to the EU from all BMC abattoirs in January 2011, and Botswana was only relisted for EU export in July 2012, although problems have continued (GoB 2013).

After an EU report evaluating the production of beef for export to the EU the Botswana Division of Veterinary Services released, in accordance with the EU recommendations, a revised cattle movement control protocol (MoA 2011). In order to control the spread of potential diseases, moving permits are only issued six weeks after the insertion of a *bolus* into the rumen, a part of the stomach of the cattle. The bolus was first introduced in 2001 as part of the Livestock Identification and Tracking System (LITS) (GoB 2013). A bolus is a 'pill' that the cattle is made to swallow and that contains information about the origin, sex, age and breed of the animal, as well as registered ownership. At sales, a bolus reader connected to a so-called 'yellow box' computer scans the bolus by swiping the rod next to the cattle's stomach, and the information contained in the bolus becomes visible on the screen on the yellow box. The leaflet posted announcing the DCP specifies that the all cattle must be *bloused* - provided with a *bolus* containing information of origin and ownership - as it is a requirement to meet the stringent traceability requirements of the EU market. However, there have been problems with disappearing boluses, or boluses that were not erased properly in between being used in different animals, as well as frequent technique failure. Due to technical failures data was missing on thirteen per cent of the national herd in 2012/2013 (ibid.), with the consequence that these animals could not be moved or easily sold. This has of course had negative effects for cattle farmers. The bolus system is being phased out and instead a system of dual ear tags will replace it.

Once origin, ownership, sex and age of the cattle is established at the cattle market, the animal can be weighed and a price offered. Once the cattle are sold and their bolus has been registered they are rebranded, loaded onto cattle trucks, often two stories high, and the door is sealed. Each seal has a specific number and that number is recorded and checked again upon arrival at the abattoir. This procedure minimises the risk of



tampering with the cattle along the way. Access to technology in terms of both fences, boluses and commercial breeds are thus crucial to market access (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

Focus on beef export to the European market has led to the government encouraging weaner production – selling cattle at the age of weaning, when they are separated from their mothers – and young, heavy tollies, or male calves, fetch the best price at the BMC and other buyers. Further, weaner production system favours those with access to technology and capital to produce heavy calves, and gives feedlots a privileged position. With feedlots owned by a wealthy white minority, skewed possibilities for benefiting from the cattle market may contribute to increase racialization of class, and the Parliamentary report on the BMC and the decline of the cattle industry (GoB 2013) compares the situation to that of the 1920s discussed above, when a licence fee and weight restrictions were imposed on cattle sold for slaughter in the Johannesburg abattoir in 1923, solidifying class divisions along racial lines.

However, there are government grants and loans available to facilitate investments in rural entrepreneurship for those with less capital. In order to promote the active participation of youth in the socio-economic development of the country and to encourage out-of-school, marginalised, unemployed and underemployed youth to engage in income generating projects, the Department of Youth at the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture has set up a Youth Development Fund (YDF) (DoY 2014). A person between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five can receive up to a hundred thousand pula (at the time of writing approximately 74,000 Swedish crowns or 8800 US dollars), of which half is a grant and half is a loan, to start up a project in agriculture, service, tourism or manufacturing.

Further, the Citizens Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), established in 2001 by the Government in order to provide financial and technical support for business development, provides loans for ‘agri-businesses’ including cattle breeding, manufacturing, property and service businesses. Beneficiaries have to be over eighteen years of age, apply for minimum five hundred pula and are required to pay back the full sum regardless of the success of the project.

Possibilities to form bore hole syndicates to share costs, access to boreholes and grazing land are also available, together with limited loans. In additions the Rural Area Development Program (RADP), launched in 1978 with the main objective to integrate the San into mainstream Batswana society (Nthomang 2004), now includes a scheme where adults in remote area settlements are entitled to either five cattle or fifteen goats

(Moreki et al. 2010). After Bakgalagadi and San were resettled from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, New Xade amongst other resettlement areas in 1997 and 2002 the compensation scheme provided some of them, although not, with five head of cattle or fifteen goats (Hitchcock and Babchuk 2007).

I will now discuss the history of the gendered nature of cattle production in Botswana, tracing it up to the present.

## Gender and cattle in Botswana

The favouring of the beef sector by the government means a favouring of what has been seen traditionally as a male sector (Hovorka 2012). With cattle mediating social life, the way women position themselves in relation to them, materially and discursively, as I will show in chapter 6 and 7, is relevant for how they can benefit from their cattle ownership. Women's cattle ownership today is understood, by themselves and by others, in relation to accounts of women's property relations to cattle in the past.

### **Women's participation in livestock production in Botswana in the past**

As noted previously, it is commonly accepted that the nature of the customary law in Tswana societies excluded women from controlling and accessing grazing land and cattle with a division of labour placing women as being responsible for crops and the household and men for cattle (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990, Schapera 1994, Kalabamu 2005). Similar divisions of labour have been noted for the Kgalagadi society (Kuper 1970, Solway 1988, 1992, Lepekoane 1994), although Solway came to know many women who held a few head of cattle in secret, unknown to their husband and his relatives (Solway 1988: 210ff). While Herero women have historically been involved in the milking and daily care for the cattle, they have been portrayed as not being in control of either individual cattle or the herd (Vivelo 1977). Men were able to keep charge of the cattle through inheritance (Bollig and Gewald 2000), and cattle were of real importance for Herero masculinity (McCullers 2011). The Afrikaners are described by Russell and Russell (1979) and Guenther (2015) as pastoralists farming as families, but while the Russell and Russell tell of women slaughtering cattle and driving trucks, they are referred to as 'farmers' wives' with little control over herds. Women are not mentioned as cattle owners by either Russell and Russell (1979) who write about English farmers in Ghanzi, or by Guldbrandsen (2012) when describing the English cattle farming elite. Although women might have been involved in ways not documented, these

accounts give us an idea about the gendered images around cattle. The picture that emerges is that men have been in control of cattle (Hovorka 2012) whereas women have not, or in Ribot and Peluso's (2003) terms, authority to control cattle. While the women central to my study belong to all these different ethnic groups, it is the Tswana, historically the numerically and politically dominant group in Botswana, who have been most important in shaping the context of cattle production sector today.

Schapera and Comaroff and Comaroff (Schapera 1938, Comaroff and Comaroff 1990, 1991, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953), Schapera 1994) have extensively studied the Tswana, and they describe cattle production as being both central to society and as a male domain. Comaroff and Comaroff (1990) note two crucial observations from scholars of traditional Batswana society from the very first records: "a man's wealth was counted in livestock; and that the division of labour placed women securely in cultivation, gathering and domestic tasks, while men devoted themselves to herding, hunting and tanning" (ibid.: 196). Women's possibilities for acquiring cattle during their lifetime were limited, as they were excluded from the patrilineal forms of inheritance of livestock, and because the products that women controlled, such as grain and other crops, were not often entered into trade circuits (Kinsman 1983).

However, the customary rights of women to inherit and own property - and notably cattle - independent of husbands or other male guardians, was affirmed by chief Khama III of the Ngwato in the late 1890's (Morton 1998). 'Khama's law' as it came to be known was part of his more general liberalisation of cattle ownership, when he for example denounced his right to the *mafisa* cattle he had placed in his subjects' care. The practice of granting women property rights to cattle spread, but in a dispute with a rival, Khama's son downplayed women's rights, as it permitted him to strike against all the rival family's cattle, including the women's, in efforts to destroy their wealth. Further, the colonial authorities were unwilling to grant women customary property rights, and the confusion created by Khama's son around Khama's law complicated the issue. By referring to literary references, historical records and documentation of court cases, Morton (1998) argues that the educated influential Tswana chiefs and others that acted as Schapera's informants on Tswana 'traditions' were able to define the nature of these traditions, and in the process reasserted men's rights over women that had in fact been changed generations earlier. Morton (1998) uses this account to show how history is created, imagined and invented differently at different times in Botswana. When Schapera was commissioned to record Tswana customary rights, the influential older

men who were the main part of his informants, Morton suggests, were perhaps not primarily interested in ensuring that their accounts were representative of actual practice.

By minimising the drastic effects of Khama's law they basically set progressive gender developments back a generation. However, during the late colonial period, women started reasserting their property rights again (Morton 1998), and also Schapera (1994) notes that already in the 1930's, when market economy and capitalism had reached the country, exceptions to men's exclusive ownership of cattle in Botswana had started to take place, with some fathers gifting cattle to their daughters.

### **Property legislation affecting women**

Although the Constitution of Botswana (GoB 1966) prohibited all forms of discrimination, there was no specific mention of sex and/or gender based discrimination in the text. As a consequence, many policies and legislations adopted soon after independence did not employ a language that included women, or take women's situations and interests into account (Kalabamu 2006). The Tribal Land Act from 1968 that shifted responsibility for land allocation from tribal chiefs to Land Boards was such a document. Under this Act any 'tribesmen' who were part of the community were allowed to graze their cattle on communal grazing land and thus effectively formalised women's exclusion from access to grazing land (Frimpong 1995, Kalabamu 2006). Women were forced to access land through husbands or male relatives, as no land was allocated to women regardless of socio-economic or marital status (Parson 1981, Frimpong 1995, Kalabamu 2005) - what Ribot and Peluso (2003) would call 'access via negotiations of other social relationships'. The original wording of the Tribal Land Act was changed in the amendment in 1993 to the word 'citizens', thereby extending the same legal usufruct rights to tribal grazing land to women as to men (Frimpong 1995, Kalabamu 2005).

Women's *de facto* exclusion from property rights to land and cattle were however upheld by a combination of a number of laws that together allocated property control to men. Before the Married Persons Property Act in 1971, husbands were the sole administrators of properties held by both parties, and did not need the wife's consent in order to dispose of any property (Kalabamu 2005). This Act gave the couple the choice to marry in or out of 'community of property'. However, the Criminal Act did not allow the wife to dispose of the property without her husbands' consent (Molokomme et al. 1998).

Further, the Deeds Registry Act stated that immovable property (land) could not be transferred to a woman married in community of property, unless it was explicitly excluded from the community or the marital power by law or if it was an inheritance or donation (ibid.). Whereas the couple's property is treated as one holding under this Act, The Marital Power Act undermined the communal aspect by granting the husband control of the holding and the right to dispose of it without his wife's consent (Molokomme et al. 1998). To marry out of community of property meant that while the husband was still the manager of the estate, whatever was registered under the wife's name would not be affected if he made bad economic decisions (ibid.) With an amendment of the act in 2014 (GoB 2014), spouses can now make changes in what property to include in the communal property after the marital union, which was not the case before. The Deeds Registry Act of 1960 proclaimed that no immovable property (land) could be registered by a married woman, unless it was specifically excluded from the marital power of the husband (Frimpong 1995: 7). An amendment to this Act in 1996 asserted that no registration of deeds (ownership) was to take place by either spouse, married in community of property or not, without proof of the other's consent. However, even after this change, only women were in practice asked to produce such proof (Kalabamu 2006). However, as Lastarria-Cornheil et al. (2014) point out, even when a change in legal property rights occur, women do not necessarily have the legal know-how to claim their *de facto* access to that land.

Around 1970s close to fifty per cent of Botswana's male population were employed in the mines (Lucas 1987) leading to an increase in *de facto* female headed households (Solway 1979). With this relative increase in *de facto* access to land, women could to a larger extent produce what they needed, and it could also have been a start to perceiving women as having individual rights (Larsson 1999). With the absence of men, women took up roles in the household previously reserved for men, and they needed access to the arable land in their own right as a consequence. Moreover, the rapid increase of the HIV/AIDS epidemic from the mid-1980s that had reached 23.3 per cent of the country's population (ibid.) left a lot of single headed households in its wake, and HIV/AIDS numbers are still high (Guldbrandsen 2012: 265). It is also of interest to note that women increasingly also took up paid employment during this time which enabling them to gain economic independence from men (Kalabamu 2006: 239).

In 1986 a group of women mobilised other women into a social movement called *Emang Basadi*, 'Stand Up, Women!', demanding that Botswana change legislature discriminatory to women (Leslie 2006). Since

the 1980's Botswana has accepted several regional and international conventions that promote gender equality and has in subsequent decades made efforts to amend gender biased regulations such as access to land (Kalabamu 2006). The general increase of wage employment following the economic boom in the early 1970s and the amendment of numerous legislations into gender neutral language led to an increase in the proportion of women in cash employment and in formerly male occupations such as chiefs, ministers, high court judges and ministries (Kalabamu 2006). The Abolition of Marital Power Act from 2004 was officiated in order to give any woman the right to sign contracts or execute transactions with banks or any other financial institution without the need for consent by a husband or male relative (Quansah 2005).

This means that today, any adult woman, married or not, can legally own (or use) land and cattle, sign contracts, and execute transactions with banks or other financial institution without the proof of her husband's or male relative's consent. This further means that women now have independent access to credit and loans – something that is often needed to start up or expand cattle operations. With these changes in property legislation concerning women's property rights women's, possibilities of engaging in cattle production have increased. These changes in property legislation created a base on which to challenge cattle's formerly almost exclusive association with men. I will show in chapters 6 and 7 how women have made use of these changes in practice, but also what challenges they face.

Cattle are today often owned together by a married couple, but individual ownership can be specified through the registration of different cattle brands, and specifying that those cattle are not included in the community of property. Nevertheless, *de facto* decision power of individual men and women in particular households cannot be assumed to be based exclusively on these laws. As Rankin (2003) shows, women might strategically choose to decline property claims in order to avoid suffering exclusion from social networks and material security. Thus, as pointed out by Arora-Jonsson (2014) in her review on gender research and environmental policy, informal mechanisms that produce gender inequalities in relation to property are not necessarily addressed by governments' efforts to further gender equality by formalising individual rights of ownership and access to resources. To understand this, we need to develop a qualified understanding of cattle ownership from different kinds of circumstances and how it relates to actual control of cattle. In line with Jackson's (2003, see also Agarwal 1994b: 1457) argument, the legal right to own property, in this case cattle, does not necessarily mean actual control

over how to manage and use the animals. However, it does give women a platform to secure resources, which in turn could lead to increased relative control over cattle, a factor that is potentially important in the negotiation of their positions in society (cf. Agarwal 1994a).

In 2006 an initiative was launched at the Department of Gender Affairs (Formerly Department of Women's Affairs) in Ghanzi to promote women's entrepreneurship, where women could apply for grants to start their own commercial enterprises through the creation of syndicates. Men were allowed in the syndicates as long as there was a majority of women in each group. Five syndicates consisting over all of thirty-five women and five men were granted start-up money. Although the initiative was open for many types of activities four out of five groups started beef cattle operations (DGA 2012). This shows an interest from the government's side to enable women through commercial activities, and an interest on the part of the women to engage in cattle production. Initially I planned to interview the women included in this project, but logistical problems in connection with requests from the head of Ghanzi DGA to approach them in connection with one of their scheduled visits that kept being postponed prevented me from including them in the interview study. However, I met a three of them by chance at different cattle related events.

### **Intersectionality of cattle production in Botswana**

Women participating in or dependent on cattle production in various ways find themselves differently positioned in relation to grazing land and cattle. Class places women from wealthy families in different communities in a stronger position to gain material welfare in comparison to those women with access to fewer resources. Further, fathers' cattle gifts to daughters, noted above, emerged only among the wealthier strata of Botswana families (Schapera 1994) and in the early 1980s was still a minority practice (Peters 1984). For those fortunate few daughters who received a gift of cattle, the animals could "represent a kernel of independence from her husband and from kinsmen" (ibid. 1984: 105). There are no records of women owning much cattle before the 1890's, Morton (1998) notes, but with the rapid growth of unequal labour relations and even slavery, after 1850 wealthier women saw an improvement of their status within the family. With slave labour the need for wives' and children's labour decreased and families became increasingly monogamous and shrank in size (ibid.). Women took on the roles as supervisors of agricultural and domestic workers and left manual labour behind. Women, Morton (1998: 8) notes, "actually became

owners of people sooner than they became owners of cattle”. Here, economic status and class intersected with gendered cattle relations in such a way that women from wealthier families from certain ethnic groups gained control over cattle. A father would sometimes give his daughter two or three head of cattle when she left home after marriage (Peters 1984). However, Kinsman (1983) points out that the control of the cattle probably passed to her husband and sons once they reached the new *kraal*, because of the gendered division of labour excluding women from cattle management, pointing towards intersections of gender and class disfavoured women. While women cattle owners in my sample with larger herds had received cattle from their parents, some had also bought their cattle themselves. Further, while a few of the women with smaller herds had also been gifted cattle by their parents, they too, found other means to acquire cattle, as I shall discuss in chapter 5.

## Conclusions

Class relations – and certainly labour relations – as we have seen, have taken on a racialized character throughout history, and thus what is seen as appropriate property relations to land and cattle differ for different people and cattle differ. Boundary maintenance of ethnicity and race (Kent 2002) has thus been articulated through articulations of property relations to land, cattle and ideas about appropriate hierarchies of labour relations. The political economy of cattle production in Botswana has thus favoured some women’s access to cattle assets more than others. Whereas San women as a group, along with San men have been disadvantaged through racial class relations placing them as labourers in the lowest class of both social strata and wealth, white women have been privileged at the other end of that dynamic.

Differences in access to capital and labour, crucial for the ability to benefit from a resource (Ribot and Peluso 2003), thus give strong advantage to the white cattle farmers. The black cattle farmers who are part of the elite enjoyed similar advantages, whereas those of lower classes were faced with a more challenging situation. As class and race intersect through history, as seen above, class in terms of social strata took on ethnic and racial articulations (Ortner 2006). Thus women belonging to a group associated with a higher class might enjoy the privileges that belonged to that class although they did not own cattle or land themselves, being able to access the cattle assets of her husband or family. This is something I shall discuss further in chapter 7.



Although women are members of different classes, to a large extent shaped by ethnicity and race as discussed above, women as a group have been ‘othered’ in the cattle sector (Hovorka 2012). While generally women as a group are seen as not linked to cattle in the socio-symbolic realm, to use Rao’s (2008) term, I discuss in chapter 5 how there are exceptions to this, and in chapter 6 how women themselves draw on different relations to cattle to *do* gender. Further, the way that women’s property rights were outmanoeuvred when formalising customary law in Morton’s (1998) account above, shows the power of storytelling when linked to ethnicity and traditions in legitimising claims to property (Rose 1994, Fortmann 1995) and gendered association with a certain species (Hovorka 2012). Even when profiting from a privileged position in terms of ethnicity, race and/or class, and although examples of wealthy women’s independent cattle ownership do exist, generally their ability to benefit from cattle have to a large extent been mediated by husbands or male family members. Women’s ability to independently own and control cattle is thus not only assured by family wealth or social status.

Further, statistics show that the women who do own cattle tend to own smaller herds than men (GoB 2014), and as a result, the development of the TGLP ranches, who privileged owners of larger herds, also solidified the gender gap of exclusive property rights to grazing land. In this way, developments that favoured the wealthier farmers in practice also disfavoured women together with the lower classes, reinforcing the double effects of skewed property relations to grazing land and cattle of gender and class. Thus, access to labour, capital, technology, authority and the market have been unequal and to a large extent mediated by social identity and other social relationships (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Over all, cattle production in Botswana has been dominated by men across ethnicity, race and class lines, and women have not been socio-symbolically associated with independent cattle control, or authority over cattle management, even when benefitting from cattle assets to various degrees.

Botswana’s beef trade with the EU has characterized the country’s cattle sector for the past few decades, and has been the motor behind the commercialisation of cattle production. In spite of government initiatives to promote gender equality, women are not targeted for cattle projects explicitly. However, increased efforts from the government to commercialise cattle production and at the same time promote youth and women’s entrepreneurship have given a platform on which it is legally and increasingly economically possible for women to engage in cattle farming. How women use this platform is something I discuss in chapter 7. In the

next chapter I shall introduce the cattle production network of Ghanzi District and discuss how women are situated in terms of gender, ethnicity, race and class and how they keep cattle under different conditions.

## 5 Women and cattle in Ghanzi District

### Introduction

While international and national factors determine the primary context for Botswana's cattle sector, it is the ways they play out locally that influence how individual farmers are able to establish claims to cattle assets and benefit from their cattle ownership. In this chapter I discuss how access to technology, capital, market and labour, sometimes mediated by social identity and other social relations (Ribot and Peluso 2003), situate women cattle owners in Ghanzi differently in terms of property relations to cattle.

After a vignette portraying what a day in the *kraal* can be like, this chapter starts with a short section outlining how women are positioned in common assumptions about gender relations in cattle farming in Botswana as formulated by scholars, Ministry of Agriculture staff and other people I met in Gaborone. I show how the long-standing association between men and cattle (Hovorka 2012) is strengthened by making women's active participation and ownership invisible though their continual formulation as exceptions.

The second section shows how different women keep cattle within the two production systems based on extensive grazing, and how they are positioned. In the next section I discuss how intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class situate the women I have interviewed differently in terms of access to grazing land and herd size. I show how racialisation of property relations and labour access are normalised through stories of land use (Rose 1994, Fortmann 1995) and how interdependence between groups is framed based on the idea of them being inherently different in relation to the environment (Sundberg 2008).

The concluding section draws together a picture of how cattle production is on the one hand gendered and places women as a group in certain positions within cattle production, but on the other hand are far from being a homogeneous group and are positioned differently in terms of access to the necessities of cattle farming.

### **Narrative: A day at the kraal**

*There is a lot of waiting in Ghanzi. Waiting for the cattle to come in to drink, for opportunities to sell cattle, for trucks delayed on the sandy roads, for vaccines and boluses to become available, and for the extension officers or the police from the Stock Theft Division to come to the farms and market places for check-ups or sales. There is waiting for decisions on veterinary practices, on new rules and regulations concerning cattle holdings and on updates on the status of EU export possibilities. Above all, though, there is waiting for the rain. Without the rains in the rainy season, the grass would not grow and the cattle would starve. If you have a fenced farm where you can practise rotational grazing management around the watering points, or if you have the resources to buy food for your animals, the crisis is softened, but all farmers struggle in times of drought.*

*The rainy season – roughly between November and March – is of vital importance for the farmers in Ghanzi, and the fortune of the rest of the year is dependent on these rains. If and when the rains come, the sandy road banks start to shimmer with green, and warthogs and ostriches collect to taste the delights on offer. The vast veld, the sandy plains covered with camel thorn trees and thorny bushes, turns from pale shades of brown to a living green, and cattle spend more time away from the watering holes at the cattle posts. When the rains lure the grass out of the ground, the roads become dangerous at night. Cattle, goats, antelopes, warthogs and ostriches start moving across the veld between food and water, and with neither streetlights nor fences along the roads, accidents are frequent.*

*Elisabeth lives on one of the fenced freehold Ghanzi Farms with a large herd of cattle. Her English father, who had originally come to Southern Africa from England to participate in the South African war, moved to Ghanzi and started a cattle operation in 1912. He eventually married a Nharo-speaking woman and Elisabeth was born on the farm. When she grew up, Elisabeth's first language was Nharo, although she also spoke English. When her father died she moved to live with relatives in England and only came back to Botswana many years later, after she had married an English man with whom she had three children. Her daughter lives in*

*Maun, but has some cattle grazing on Elisabeth's farm. When the family first came back to Botswana, they lived in Maun and Elisabeth worked as a hairdresser there, but when they divorced, and her husband and sons moved back to England, Elisabeth decided to go back to the farm and buy some cattle. Her eldest son Eric came back to Ghanzi as an adult to farm cattle on the neighbouring farm and George, her youngest son, came back a year before my visit to help Elisabeth manage her farm. The sons, as Elisabeth herself, are today part of the English community in Ghanzi, although Elisabeth also considers herself Nharo.*

*For quite some time, Elisabeth had been talking about how she needed to sell some cattle in order to be able to afford to improve her fences, and to buy the material necessary for new fences, so when I heard that the BMC were planning to come to the area to buy cattle under their 'direct purchase scheme' (described in chapter 4) – when they come with their own trucks straight to the farms to buy the animals directly – I mentioned it to her. As this would save her the trouble of organising transport for the cattle to the market or all the way to the BMC abattoir in Lobatse, she contacted the representative straight away. Being the owner, Elisabeth, who usually left the daily attention of the cattle to her hired Nharo cattle-hands, had to be present at sales. In the early morning we had tea with the door open to make sure we heard the sound of the cattle truck as it approached on the sand track. There was always a little worry that the truck would get stuck in the thick sand around the third gate leading up to the farm, but that morning, all went well. We followed the truck in Elisabeth's pick-up to the kraal, where the farm workers had already gathered the cattle she had chosen to sell. At the kraal, we met the BMC representative, the truck driver, the stock theft police officer and her assistant, two extension officers from the Division of Veterinary Services (DVS) and their driver. While they got their papers in order, George and I helped the cattle-hands to slowly push the cattle into the newly built chute. George had prepared a table and two chairs outside the kraal under a green sun screener net held up by wooden poles. He joked that this way the visitors would be in a better mood and the whole operation would go smoother. Elisabeth stood back. As long as we kept our distance and stood strategically in relation to the wide opening of the chute, the cattle would keep moving calmly into the long wooden pole structure until it was filled with animals in a single row.*

*The police officer began checking that Elisabeth's brand registration matched up with the brand on each animal, and noted its colour and sex on a form. The veterinary officers got out the 'yellow box' and the reading rod connected to it. As one officer passed the rod up and down the animal's side,*

*it picked up the information on the bolus inside the stomach that was especially programmed when inserted, and sent the data to the computer in the yellow box. The other officer checked that the information corresponded to the information provided by the owner in terms of ownership brand and origin of the animal. If the information on the bolus did not match, or the rod did not pick up any information, the animal could not be sold. Elisabeth had a fenced farm, and was able to make sure that all her cattle were present when the DVS had come earlier that year to insert boluses into the stomachs of all the new calves. However, a bolus may malfunction or the information from the previous installation in another animal may not have been erased properly when recycled so that the cattle can appear to be registered to someone else. Luckily, all the boluses were in place with the correct information, and the cattle were steadily moved forward.*

*The veterinary officer also checked the teeth of the cattle to determine their age before they were moved on to the scale, as prices rise the younger and heavier the animals are. On the other side of the scale, the kraal was divided in two, so that the cattle could be let out into one or the other easily. If there were any animals that the BMC representative did not wish to buy, they were put to one side, and those that were to be loaded on his truck were put to the other side. Elisabeth was walking up and down the row of animals, making sure she wanted to sell all the cattle that had been lined up, and occasionally arguing with the veterinary officers about the age of a cow. As the morning progressed, the heat became increasingly intense, and we all gravitated towards the shade when possible. Elisabeth had prepared plastic bottles with frozen water for the day, and we took turns sipping the water that melted off the ice. Before long, the ice was all gone, and we refilled the empty bottles at the reservoir that stores drinking water for the cattle, pumped from the borehole.*

*After a while, a heifer with a different brand showed up in the chute. The stock theft police officer halted the procedures and turned to Elisabeth. Elisabeth explained that it was her daughter Emma's cattle that she kept on Elisabeth's farm and had asked Elisabeth to sell for her when the opportunity arose. The officer inquired about the necessary documentation and Elisabeth pulled out a dated letter of consent that Emma had written and signed, confirming that Elisabeth was allowed to sell her cattle in her absence. However, the police officer also asked to see a copy of Emma's photo ID. Elisabeth and her family did not know about this rule, and she discussed with George and the police officer to find a solution. The officer insisted that there could be no sale of Emma's cattle without this document, and the line of cattle in the chute was growing impatient in the heat.*

*George got his sister on the phone and finally came up with an idea. If she faxed a copy of her ID from Maun to the post office in Ghanzi, George would follow the cattle truck to Ghanzi and pick it up and hand it to the BMC representative before the cattle truck driver started the long journey back south to Lobatse. Everyone seemed happy with that solution and the row of cattle was able to start moving forward again.*

*Once all the cattle had been processed, we herded them down a fenced sand path to where the cattle truck was parked, and on to the ramp and into the two-storey vehicle. When all the animals were inside, the truck driver closed the gate and sealed it shut. The seals were marked with individual numbers recorded by the DVS officers, and one copy each was given to Elisabeth and the BMC. This ensured that the cattle could not be tampered with or switched between the farm and the abattoir, and that only cattle with a proper traceability record would reach the export abattoir. Only beef living up to these EU requirements reaches the EU market. Once the postal cheque from the BMC came in the mail a few weeks later, Elisabeth was able to cash it in at the post office and buy the fence material needed for improved grazing management on her farm. Moreover, she even had money left over to go for a trip to visit her friends in Denmark!*

*In another part of Ghanzi District, other farmers also wished to sell some cattle. When visiting the market place in Chobokwane just before lunchtime on the day of the announced cattle sale, the challenges faced by farmers with smaller herds became clear. The buyer organising the market was Feedmaster, the biggest feedlot company in Botswana, which also functions as a middle man selling to the BMC. Driving up to a shady spot near the kraals, we were met by an almost empty plain, two or three trucks, a handful of people and only a few dozen cattle. Thato and I walked up to one of the men leaning on the wooden poles of the kraal, and asked him what was going on. He told us that the market the previous day in another village had dragged on until late, and that they were still finishing up that morning. The cattle farmers in Chobokwane, who had found out about the time delay, had not brought their cattle to the market, but the man himself had only received the information when he arrived. As he lived quite far away he had decided to wait with his cattle to see whether the buyers would show up.*

*This kind of thing was quite common, he explained, and added that the last time a buyer had come to the market, they had ended up being two days late, and all the farmers had had to take their cattle home and then back again another day. He explained that not only does moving cattle in the heat put a considerable stress on them, but making them stand in a kraal for too long without access to water or grazing would kill them pretty*

*quickly. Some farmers had the means to bring water and hay to the kraals, but most, he continued, were not able to do so. What is more, he added, even if the buyers showed up, the veterinary officer might not show up, or the police vehicle might break down, and then the whole operation would be delayed anyway. For the farmers who were not able to bring water and feed to the market kraals, this meant moving the cattle back to their farm again, putting further stress on the animals. Furthermore, once they had been released on the non-fenced, communal grazing land to graze, it was a big job herding them back together again, as not all cattle came in to drink at the same time. Getting the same cattle back to the market in time for the actual sale was thus a difficult challenge. \**

This account shows what a day in the *kraal* can look like for a woman cattle owner and how cattle owners who kept their animals under different conditions face various challenges. Someone with a large herd and fenced, privately-held grazing land might still run into problems, but would be differently situated to deal with them than a farmer with a small herd on non-fenced communal grazing land. Before exploring further the different starting points from which women cattle owners in Ghanzi District engage in cattle production, I shall discuss four ideas I encountered in the field about how women relate to cattle, which shape ideas about who cattle farmers are and who potential women cattle farmers might be.

#### Four ideas about how women relate to cattle

Cattle production in Botswana was described to me as a ‘citadel of male power’ by a gender researcher at the University of Botswana in 2012. Even in casual conversation, this idea was the standard view held by people in various capacities around Gaborone, from researchers to taxi drivers to Ministry of Agriculture staff and cattle sector experts. As I noted in the first few chapters, it was also an aspect commonly discussed in the literature about Botswana’s cattle history (Schapera 1938, 1994, Peters 1984, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Schapera and Comaroff 1991 (1953), Gulbrandsen 2012). Despite variations, studies show how women around the world are still more likely to engage in livestock management of small stock, indigenous breeds and small scale, non-commercial production (Distefano 2013, Chanamuto and Hall 2015, Hovorka 2015, Smith 2015). When women do work with larger animals, dairy cattle is the typical example (Distefano 2013, Hovorka 2015), and women in descriptions and studies from Botswana and other countries in Africa are not typically shown to be engaged in the practices of cattle rearing,



least of all beef production, in the same way as men are (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Hodgson 1999b, Njuki and Mburu 2013, Njuki and Sanginga 2013a, 2013b).

Although the ‘average Motswana’ was not expected to engage in cattle production, when scratching the surface of the idea that cattle production in Botswana is a citadel of male power, three exceptions began to emerge. If there were any women who had cattle, people in Gaborone told me in different ways, it would be widows ... or maybe the Hereros ... or again, possibly the ‘rich, white’ women – exceptions that did not really count. The ‘rules of the game’ (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998) framing cattle farmers as men are kept in place and even strengthened by using the simple strategy of framing the women who do actively participate as being exceptions.

### **Widows do not really count**

The former agricultural economist that we met in the introduction chapter qualified his statement about the lack of women farming cattle in Botswana. There were some widows, he explained, who were left with cattle when their husbands died, but otherwise it was the men who own and work with cattle. The idea that widows with cattle somehow do not really count as female cattle owners or cattle farmers was to reappear again and again during my next eight months in the field, whether talking to farmers, political decision makers or other key people in the cattle industry. It might give a clue as to why cattle farming can be seen as a male sphere despite the large number of women heading cattle operations. To obtain some hard data, I went to see the agricultural statistician at the head office in Gaborone. Together, we examined the national statistics to compile a table about male and female-headed cattle holdings from the mid-1990s onwards, when gender disaggregated data were first collected.

As we punched in the numbers, we discussed the collection of the data. It turned out that, according to the statistician, female owned cattle holdings in practice was defined as meaning female-headed households with cattle. Cattle were assumed, I understood by the statistician’s explanations, to belong to the head of the household, who in turn was assumed to be the husband, if the household included a husband. When I asked how they would classify a husband and a wife with a herd each, thinking about a certain woman I had met who was operating in this way with her husband, the statistician simply answered that such constellations did not exist in Botswana. According to the statistician’s statement, the methodology used to collect the data might thus have excluded holdings headed by wives, daughters, or where both partners were managers.

What the official statistics do tell us is that at least roughly 24 per cent of the national herd is in fact owned by women, according to official statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA 2014). That represents an important share of Botswana's cattle. Furthermore, included in the total number of cattle holdings and numbers of cattle that were registered in the country are also cattle companies (around 11 per cent) that are not registered by gender. This means that even if the number of female owned cattle holdings shows an increase from around 22 per cent in 1995 to around 34 per cent in 2012 (MoA 2014), it is difficult to conclude with certainty what these numbers signifies, apart from there being a significant number of women heading cattle operations. If women's cattle ownership in male-headed households was not counted in the collection of statistics, according to the statistician I met, the actual numbers might in fact be even greater.

Apart from the forty cattle-owning women I interviewed in Ghanzi District, I talked to at least double that number, and was told about many more. When I visited the Ghanzi DVS, one of the veterinarians sent me to his colleague who kept the brand certificate registry. She showed me a large, badly stained book, made out of papers tied together with string, containing the list of registered brands. Although the records were incomplete – some books were kept in other offices and some had been temporarily misplaced for a long time – the existing records offered some hints as to what was happening around the *kraals* in rural Ghanzi. While the majority of the names and social identification numbers in the book turned out to be male (gendered disaggregated records are not kept, but social identification numbers indicate sex), branding certificates showing women's legal ownership of cattle were by no means rare.

In 2013, national gender disaggregated statistics of cattle holding ownership show that in Ghanzi District 'traditional sector' there were 942 male owned cattle operations with a total of 54,622 head of cattle, and 646 female owned cattle operations with a total of 43,089 head of cattle (MoA 2015). In the 'commercial sector', there were 99 male owned cattle operations with 63,581 cattle and 27 female owned cattle operations with 7,212 cattle on freehold farms. Further, there were 209 male owned cattle operations with 54,198 cattle and 57 female owned cattle operations with 7,212 cattle on TGLP (leasehold) farms (ibid). However, the cattle brand certificate registry in Ghanzi suggested that there were even more women with their own cattle brands. Although the records were incomplete, there were at least 478 women in 2009 who had registered a new brand in Ghanzi District, and another 235 who had renewed their certificate. In 2010 there

were at least 283 women who had registered a new brand, and at least 180 who had renewed their certificate. There are thus more women with their own brands in Ghanzi District than there are numbers of female owned cattle operations in the official statistics. As national gender disaggregated data on official cattle brand ownership was not available, a comparison on a national level could not be made.

A registered brand is, of course, different from a cattle operation, and it is possible to register a brand without having cattle. However, there was both a cost and some administrative work involved, so there was little reason to believe that women would register brands if they did not have any cattle to brand. I shall discuss the importance of brands in a later chapter, and will only note here that these numbers indicate the possibility of there being larger numbers of women cattle owners than is commonly acknowledged.

It is also important to remember that Ghanzi District is particularly dry, and thus crop production is particularly challenging. Although the dry *veld* made cattle production challenging too, grass does grow after the rains, making cattle farming a viable alternative. Ghanzi was also far from the larger towns where selling crafts or shop keeping was more profitable. Therefore, cattle could be an even more attractive option here than in other places in Botswana. At the same time, these conditions are not exclusive to Ghanzi District, although they were found there in their most extreme form. However, spending a few days around Maun and Gaborone I would tentatively ask women I met – airport staff, waitresses, women waiting next to me for the bus, in the shop, and so on, as well as informants' acquaintances, – if they knew about women having cattle. Some told me that 'cattle are for men', but more than thirty of these women turned out to be cattle owners themselves. All the women except one could tell me the breed of their animals, as well as how they had acquired them.

The assumption that women with independent cattle ownership were those heading households with no adult male present was also a common reflection, across different ethnicities in Ghanzi. Kagiso, an older Mokgalagadi woman who took over the management of a Ghanzi Farm when her husband passed away around a year before I met her, explained that most of the women became involved in cattle production as a result of their husbands' dying. Simon, the oldest English farmer on the Ghanzi Farms, and one of the first settlers of European descent in the area that was still alive, invited me for tea and English fruit-cake in the kitchen of his family farm, while he pondered my question as to whether he knew of any female cattle farmers.

At first he could not think of any around Ghanzi, but after a few sips of tea he found a couple in his memory. However, he emphasised, they were all “widows who were forced to take over when their husbands died” (interview 9 December 2013, Ghanzi Farms). Simon’s answer was fairly typical for both the men and the women that I met on the Ghanzi Farms, as well as for the people I talked to who lived in Gaborone. Somehow, because these women were perceived as not having made their own informed choice to rear cattle, but were rather ‘forced’ into it by their husband’s death, they did not seem to really count. However, whether or not these widows actually engaged in cattle production out of need, in the sense that they had no other choice than to take over the herd after the husband died, or whether they did so because they wanted to, we do not know. Similarly, Elisabeth, the older, single Nharo/English woman from the narrative at the beginning of this chapter, explained that “there was not a lot of women who farmed for themselves in the old days. These days some do because the husband died” (interview 29 July 2013, Elisabeth’s farm). Again, women engaged in cattle farming were assumed to be widows. Nevertheless, Elisabeth herself was not a widow but decided to buy cattle after she had divorced her husband. Conceptualising women engaged in cattle farming as widows and as non-deviant exceptions strengthens the dominant idea of the existing social structure that identifies cattle as being part of the male and the masculine.

Simon, who was himself a widower, shared responsibility for the farm with his son and his family, and often proved to be the first person other Afrikaner and English farmers in the community would think of when asked about other cattle farmers. It would appear that neither age nor status of widower disqualified a person from being thought of as a cattle farmer in his own right. Being a widower, such as Simon was, did not weaken or significantly alter the perception of him as being a cattle farmer in the same sense as being a widow does for a woman. Instead it was assumed that the herd was under his (the widower’s) control even before the death of the spouse. Jack and Danielle, who are an older Afrikaner couple living on one of the largest freehold farms in the area, expressed the same dominant idea when I interviewed them. At first, they could not think of any female farmers around the Ghanzi Farms, but then Danielle added, “Christine wouldn’t have gotten so involved if her husband hadn’t died” (interview 12 December 2013, Danielle and Jack’s farm). The only woman they could think of that was active in cattle management was portrayed as doing so because of unfortunate circumstances. After pausing again to try to think of any other female cattle farmers in their community, Danielle concluded

that, “a wife would supervise or look after sheep, because they are for the household, but would not get involved in the cattle” adding later that “if the husband looks after them well enough, they don’t need to have their own cattle” (interview 12 December 2013, Danielle and Jack’s farm). Danielle was implicitly stating that cattle are the foundation of the family’s economy, and as such are something that women should get involved with only out of necessity, as the family’s economy is the man’s responsibility.

### **Rich, white women**

When I went to see the Head of Department of Agricultural Statistics and Research at the Ministry of Agriculture in Gaborone, a middle-aged Motswana man, he was excited over my study but warned me not to be fooled by the culture within which cattle production was embedded. He explained that out of respect, widows might refer to their cattle as belonging to their late husbands, and only after ‘digging deeper’ would I see that they were actually their own. Although the widows I met usually claimed ownership of their herd straight away, these words of caution are of interest. The Head of Department was well aware of the complex relation between kinship and cattle-farming discussed previously, but still referred only to widows as potential ‘hidden’ cattle farmers. When I asked him about married women, or women who had not married, he suggested that ‘white’ and Herero women were more likely than other women to be engaged in cattle farming and have their own cattle; an idea that was to recur throughout my fieldwork.

Further, when the question of Afrikaner or English women’s engagement was brought up, they were often dismissed as ‘wealthy commercial farmers’ by researchers, Ministry of Agriculture staff and other Gaborone residents. Ghanzi as a whole would sometimes be dismissed because of its ‘white rich farmers’, on the grounds that Ghanzi was ‘not really Botswana’, as Ronald, a researcher and consultant to the Parliament put it. Gendered ideas of race and class are thus constructed in relation to ‘appropriate’ property relations to the non-human environment around them (Moore 2003, Sundberg 2008) in ways that associate certain social strata (Ortner 2006) with certain gendered property relations. White women are placed as privileged by class and race. As a result, the Afrikaner and English women are defined as different from the ‘average Motswana’, and therefore the idea that they could possibly be involved in cattle rearing could be entertained without disturbing the presupposition that cattle production was a male sphere.

### **Herero as different**

Herero women are often referred to as ‘strong women’ because of their ‘traditional’ engagement in milking, a task which, according to the Nharo, Batswana and Bakgalagadi cattle owners and cattle-hands with whom I discussed the subject, was reserved for men. When the idea of non-widowed women – women who were married or had not yet married – being active in cattle farming was not dismissed immediately, it was usually Herero women who were identified as those most likely to be engaged in this role. However, the Herero were often identified as belonging to a different culture, and not ‘really’ representing Botswana. I heard statements such as: ‘Herero women like cattle’, or ‘It’s in their culture’. These kinds of statement seem to identify and communicate the attribution of cultural differences to women through the processes of ethnic differentiation (Hylland-Eriksen 1991, Ballard 2002), or ‘boundary maintenance’ in Kent’s (2002) terms, between different people of the Kalahari.

At the same time, this boundary maintenance allows for the creation of yet other ‘exception’ to the rule of male dominance without disturbing that rule, thereby making it possible to preserve the idea of cattle production as a male affair. For the Head of Department of Agricultural Statistics and Research it was possible to imagine that Afrikaner women, traditionally growing up and living on cattle farms in relative wealth, would be actively engaged in cattle farming. Similarly, the idea that Herero women, who were already known for their milking tradition, could take a further step and possibly own or manage cattle did not strike him as unthinkable.

### **Only ‘Motswana women’s’ participation could challenge the ‘rule’.**

However, the Head of Department of Agricultural Statistics and Research found it less likely that women from other groups than the ‘whites’ or the Herero would be actively involved unless they were widowed:” If you would find a Motswana lady cattle farmer” he exclaimed, “now that would be something!” (field notes, 20 April 2013, MoA Gaborone). The picture expressed was twofold: first, that it was somehow more imaginable that Afrikaner, English or Herero women would engage in cattle farming, even when not forced by circumstances to do so; and secondly that even if they did, it would not threaten the image of cattle as a male affair unless women from other Tswana groups or possibly Kgalagadi groups were also involved. Although there are expected exceptions, the views discussed in this section clearly indicated that women, and notably Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women, were not commonly imagined to be actively engaged in cattle production.

The picture that emerged was that ‘rich, white women’, Herero women and widows might have property relations to cattle that differed from the ‘normal’. These were the women who were imagined to have stronger possible claims to cattle and control over cattle assets than other women. These common ideas around women’s participation in cattle production give us a feel for the context within which cattle farmers operate, however fluctuating they may be. The association of cattle with men in the socio-symbolic realm (Rao 2008) was strong and although certain women were identified as being engaged in cattle production, they were framed as exceptions in Botswana, thus maintaining the general ‘rule of the game’ (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998) that cattle were a male affair. While not a conscious effort, the reproduction of these ideas renders women an invisible group in the cattle sector, while actually highlighting the involvement of certain specific groups. These groups do indeed engage in cattle farming, and in the next section we shall see how women kept their cattle on fenced and non-fenced grazing land and what happens around their *kraals*.



Cattle coming in to drink. Photo: Andrea Pettit.



## Women with cattle on fenced and non-fenced farms in Ghanzi District

The women I interviewed in Ghanzi District all have their cattle in one grazing area and none of them had arrangements resembling the *mafisa* system described in chapter 4, nor expressed interest in such arrangements. Neither did any of the men I talked to mention such an agreement. Further, when I asked the women cattle farmers what they used their cattle for nowadays, none mentioned ploughing. As I shall come back to in later chapters, several of the women I interviewed mentioned that they did not grow crops at all because of the dry climate, and it was common practice to buy staple products such as mealie meal. Some of the women were engaged in paid employment, but none depended to any important extent on crop farming. The harsh Kalahari climate together with the remoteness from the comforts of larger towns contributed to an image of Ghanzi as a harsh place to live.

Living in Ghanzi was perceived for some to be an accomplishment in itself. “It’s a special kind of people who survive on the farms in Ghanzi” (interview 5 August 2013, Ghanzi town), Christine, a married Afrikaner woman in her forties with a large herd on fenced, freehold land, told me one day. For Christine, living and farming cattle in Ghanzi was something special. Even in Gaborone, when I talked to people about my fieldwork in Ghanzi, I would get ‘big eyes’ in response. ‘Ghanzi is a tough place’ (field notes, 20 April 2013, MoA Gaborone), one of the employees at the Ministry of Agriculture said, and a researcher at the Botswana Institute of Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA) told me that ‘Ghanzi – that’s a place to test your limits’ (field notes, 17 April, Gaborone). Ghanzi is often portrayed as being a kind of frontier bordering the wilderness – the ‘wild west’ of Botswana. Ghanzi as a place is closely connected to cattle and inspires a sense of remoteness, wildness and something to endure. The masculine notion of enduring the elements is reflected through a gendered perception of Ghanzi itself. A lot of men would like to live in Ghanzi, according to Wendy, a married English woman with a large herd of cattle on another freehold farm, but not women: “Ghanzi is a paradise for men and the women hate it! [...] They don’t have shopping malls [...] I think it appeals to a lot of men. The women would rather be able to go to a city” (interview 29 July 2013, Wendy’s and Peter’s farm, Ghanzi). Ghanzi ‘cattle country’ was perceived as a place suited for men and not for women. An important node in the cattle production of Ghanzi was the feedlot. The main feedlot operation in Ghanzi, run by an Afrikaner family, was in many ways central to the network of cattle in the area. The feedlot opened in 2009 and



ships around 1,200 cattle monthly to BMC in Lobatse. Marie was the daughter of the family and co-manages the operation with her parents and brother. She was in her mid-twenties and had studied animal science in South Africa before her family moved to Botswana. The facility included a small brick office building, a feed storage building, a network of metal paddocks, and handling facilities complete with a loading ramp.

Marie oversaw the loading and unloading of animals when the two-storey cattle trucks pulled in at the weighing station. There was a sharp smell in the air of manure, animal feed and cattle. With ease, she checked the numbers on the screen while the cattle stumbled through the chute where the metal clamp closes around their neck to keep them still long enough for them to be weighed. Barefoot and in shorts, Marie walked over to the stack of papers, making sure that she had all the information needed for the administration purposes. The employees, Nharo men in working overalls and some in knitted hats, were busy pushing the cattle through to the different paddocks, occasionally shouting something to each other. Once the animals had been moved to their assigned paddocks and fed, we went into the office building and sat down on the sofa. Her mother and brother were there too, preparing for the next shipment. Administration, Marie tells me, is a woman's task, as 'men just can't do it', and although she used to do more of the hands-on cattle work, for the last few years it was principally the necessary paperwork required by EU regulations that filled her days. The family bought cattle from farmers throughout Ghanzi District and sold it to local butcheries as well as to the BMC. Some of the farmers with larger herds and their own trucks drove their cattle directly to the BMC abattoir in Lobatse, but for those without that possibility, selling to the feedlot was a common and a welcome option whether they kept their animals on fenced, privately held grazing land or non-fenced, communal grazing land.

The forty women cattle owners I interviewed all kept their cattle in either one of these production systems. 'Communal farmers' are sometimes depicted as being less interested in commercial activity and instead are focused on the 'traditional' Batswana cattle exchanges and cattle accumulation per se (Burgess 2006, Masike and Ulriich 2008, Ransom 2011). Additionally, 'commercial farmers' are often assumed to view their cattle purely as a commodity, being motivated primarily by commercial interests to farm cattle (ibid.). Notably, people constructed as black, Batswana, Bakgalagadi or Herero, and possessing smaller herds, are likely to be conceptualised as practising cattle farming following subsistence principles, identified by the application of the label 'communal farming'. Similarly,

white, Afrikaner or English, as well as members of the Batswana who have larger herds, are likely to be seen as conducting ‘commercial’ farming and being driven by ‘rational’ and ‘economic’ forces (Masicke and Ulrich 2008). In chapters 6 and 7, I discuss how this might have changed in Ghanzi District. In the following I describe how women, and notably ‘rich white women’, Hereros and widows, keep their cattle on both fenced grazing land and non-fenced grazing land, to show how property relations to cattle are gendered and how practices both differ and overlap.

### **Fenced grazing land**

Thirteen of the women cattle owners I interviewed, all Afrikaner or English except one Mokgalagadi woman, had cattle grazing on the fenced, freehold Ghanzi Farms Block, and another four, all Bakgalagadi or Batswana women, had cattle on fenced leasehold grazing land in Charleshill sub-district. Virtually all white cattle farmers in the district lived in the Ghanzi Farms Block area. Herds on fenced grazing land were typically large, and consisted of exotic breeds, but some of the women, as I shall come back to in the next section, had smaller herds grazing with the larger herds of husbands or relatives. With large herds, the cattle owners arranged for the BMC or other buyers to come with a cattle truck to the loading facility on the farm to buy their cattle directly, or kept their own trucks to drive the cattle down to the BMC in Lobatse, or to other buyers. The largest herds in the district were grazing on the freehold Ghanzi Farms and it is to two of those farms I will now turn.

Christine, introduced above and Laura, her older, married aunt, lived and owned cattle together with their husbands on fenced freehold farms. They both lived in large brick houses surrounded by beautifully kept gardens. Running water and solar-powered electricity allowed for a relatively comfortable life style. While Christine’s children lived at home when they were not at boarding school, Laura’s children were adults and had moved away from home a number of years previously. Both farms had several boreholes, and Christine’s farm was one of the largest among the Ghanzi Farms. At these boreholes, there were *kraals* where the cattle were watered, and there also lived the cattle-hands, who saw to the animals on a daily basis. Thamae was an older Nharo man employed at Laura’s and her husband’s farm and he lived at one of their *kraals* with his wife Koaba.

When the first rays of sunshine reached Laura’s farm, Thamae and Koaba rolled out of their blankets that were spread on the ground in between the three mud huts. They got the fire started and as they boiled water for tea, they chatted quietly in Nharo. Their five children began to

wake up but stayed in the blankets that protected them from the chilly morning air. I got out of my tent and joined them around the fire. Together we sat sipping tea and warming our bodies, and the children came to have tea with milk and sugar before they ran off to play in the sand with a shoe and a ball from a deodorant roll-on bottle, shouting with excitement.

Thamae is employed as a cattle-hand to look after the cattle, and his wife Koaba lives with him and takes care of the household when he is not around. They do not own any cattle of their own, but keep a few chickens. In Ghanzi, many of the Nharo men are engaged in paid labour as cattle-hands on farms owned by Afrikaner or English farmers. Larger farms are usually organised both around the homestead where the owners live, and a number of cattle posts or watering holes, where the cattle-hands live.

As the sun left the horizon, there was no rush with the morning activities as the cattle were still out grazing and would only start coming to the cattle post to drink in a couple of hours' time. Cattle came to drink at the cattle posts twice a day, usually around nine or ten in the morning and then again at around four in the afternoon, but not all came every time. In between they roamed the area for grazing. The cattle-hand's job was to make sure that there was water in the trough, that all the cattle had access to the water and to ensure that all animals were healthy.

The farm had fences around the perimeter as well as fences sectioning off different grazing areas that connected separate watering holes. This meant that it was the same few hundred cattle that came in to drink every day, or every other day at each waterhole. At another cattle post on the farm, another Nharo cattle-hand lived by himself and was responsible for the herd of cattle there.

When he saw the first cattle come wandering in single file towards the water trough close to our fire, Thamae walked over to the fenced paddock that surrounded the trough and opened the gate. A few calves were already in a sectioned-off part of the paddock, watching the cattle arrive and calling for their mothers. Thamae watched as more cattle emerged from the thorny shrubs, treading up slow clouds of fine dust as they shuffled through the Kalahari sand. We leant against the fence, chatting leisurely with the help of Ditiro, who had accompanied me to translate. After a while when the paddock was full of cattle taking turns to drink, Thamae closed the gate.

We conversed for a while about his work, and then he opened the gate and we went in. Walking behind the cattle we pushed them out, in order to make room for the ones that had been waiting outside. If one left the gate open, Thamae explained, the old bulls would stay at the trough and not leave any room for the younger ones. Other than watering the cattle, he

continued, he only kept them locked up in the *kraal* when Laura's grandson Bertie, who managed the farm, needed to work with them. The work could be, for example, when the extension officers from the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) came to inspect or vaccinate the cattle in accordance with BMC regulations, or when they needed to be branded.

Thamae watched as his oldest son and daughter ran around the *kraal* playing, and explained to me that one of the bulls did not like children. Although the cattle under his care were kept for meat, his family were allowed to milk them for their daily consumption. He knew the milking cows quite well, he said, but not the other ones individually, although he knew how each and every one of them was related. When the mothers of the calves had drunk their fill of water, he sorted them out from the herd one by one by walking strategically behind them, and guided them towards the sectioned-off calves. One at a time, the cows were let in to the calves, and the two children went in with them. When the calf recognised its mother and started suckling milk, the boy bound the cow's hind legs with a rawhide rope. He squatted beside the cow's teats with a bucket between his knees. Pushing the calf away, he squeezed some milk out and washed his hands and the teats with it, and then started milking. With skilled movements, he squeezed one teat at a time with both hands so that a steady stream of milk spurted down into the bucket, making a frothy foam. Meanwhile, his younger sister was busy with a stick on the other side of the cow, keeping the calf from suckling. The calf needed to be close enough for the mother to smell it, as it encouraged her to let the milk go, but having the calf suckling at the same time as milking made the task difficult.

The young girl ran around the cattle unafraid, and was eager to help with them, although the older brother seemed to want to run the show and do it himself. Once the milking was done, the girl untied the cow, which then walked away with her calf close behind her. Only two teats were milked on each cow, so that the milk from the other two were left for the calf. Some of the milk was drunk straight away or added to tea, while some was poured into a plastic container and left overnight to make 'sour milk'. Milk, in its different forms, was a staple food for the children and an important source of energy for the whole family.

When all the cattle had been watered, the milk cows were let back out to the water trough to drink some more, so that they would be able to produce a lot of milk. Meanwhile, we walked back to the compound and sat in the shade. Around two o'clock, Thamae went to let the milk cows out to graze again, and let the calves in to drink water instead. Once they had drunk, they went back into the closed-off section, and at around four o'clock some

cattle came in to drink again. Which cows were milked changed during the year, and with the calving season spread out there were almost always a few cows to milk. However, in the event of a drought, they did not milk since the cow then would not be able to produce enough milk for both the calf and humans. Then the family would become entirely dependent on the rations from the farm owners that were included in Thamae's salary, and whatever else they could afford to buy at the farm's tuck shop.

The minimum salary of cattle-hands was 500 pula per month, and Thamae was paid slightly more than that. A five kilogram package of maize meal costs approximately fifteen pula and a five kilogram package of sugar around thirty pula. Agricultural workers were not expected to pay rent, but neither could they expect comfortable housing. The prices in the tuck shop were the same as in the Ghanzi grocery store, but the selection of items was much smaller.

For Laura and for Christine, cattle farming involved taking decisions on breeding and grazing management, selling, as well as organising vaccinations, branding and all of the other practicalities necessary for selling cattle on the market. They thus had *de facto* control over their cattle, although Laura left managing decisions to her son and Christine consulted with her husband on issues of beef cattle management. However, the stud breeding operation was entirely under Christine's control. Laura thought that she was too old to be participating in most of the farm work, and left it to her grandson to manage the hired labour. Christine, in contrast to Laura, was often out on her farm supervising her employees, giving a hand here and there, as well as checking on her cattle. Twice a week, Christine drove the two hours to Ghanzi town to leave and fetch her daughter at boarding school, do errands, get supplies and groceries and to check on the hardware store her family owned together with relatives. She ran a stud-breeding programme on her farm and preparations for the yearly Ghanzi Agricultural Show in late June, where she showed her breeding bulls, took up a lot of her time.

Christine's grandparents farmed cattle in Ghanzi, but her mother moved to South Africa, where Christine grew up. She often visited her grandparents, and always liked the cattle farming there better than the potato and maize farming that her parents were engaged in. When she got older and married, she moved with her first husband to Ghanzi and they started a cattle operation together. Christine mainly did the housework and took care of the children, but she also learned more and more about farming. When her first husband died she operated the farm by herself, but after she married Stuart, she went back to doing more administrative tasks.

Xgaiga, an older Nharo man, was employed by Christine and her husband and lived with his wife and grandchildren at one of the watering holes on the farm. They had built three mud huts with thatched roofs; typical for Nharo cattle-hands on fenced farms. His wife, Xaga, was not employed, but took care of the children and the family. Xgaiga and Xaga grew up in the area and had worked on the farm for a long time. Conditions varied between farms, but it was common that it was contractually specified that farm owners would deliver supplies to their employees once a week, as part of their salary. These usually included sugar, tea, tobacco, meat and mealie meal. Should they have wished anything else, they could have bought it from a tuck store if there was one close by or through the owners of the farm with credit from the upcoming salary.

Xgaiga's salary was however often finished before pay day, and milk from the cattle was crucial for the families' diet. The days at Xgaiga's and Xaga's compound are similar to those of Thamae and Koaba's above, and we spent long hours sitting in the shade on the sand, watching the cattle drink. Only in the evening did the family collect again, coming together around the fire for a cup of freshly brewed tea with several spoons of sugar before bed time. A small herd of goats lay down in the sand and we could hear them shuffling in the dark. The donkey that was used for riding to check on the borehole pump also slept close by. Xgaiga told me that this donkey had only been with them for a couple of years, since the old one was eaten by a lion.

The account above shows how Christine took on the role of the house wife when first moving to Ghanzi took charge of the cattle operation when becoming a widow, only to step back into administration again when she remarried. Whereas she at times had been in charge of the cattle management, the daily tasks of watering, and monitoring the cattle was always left to the employees. Cattle management and work was seen as male, but hands-on cattle chores even more specifically identified as tasks for male Nharo employees. Even among the children, as described above, it was the boy who milked the cows, although the girl was enthusiastically helped. Class, race and gender thus intersected to shape what is seen as appropriate engagements for various people, creating opportunities for some and challenges for others. Christine and Laura, 'rich, white' women, are in a position to easily access fences, cattle and grazing land as well as cattle-hands – or in Ribot and Peluso's (2003) terms, technology, capital and labour. However, in chapter 6, I will show how control over cattle varies also within this group of cattle owners. Further, Christine, and others as we shall see in later chapters, engaged in 'new' tasks associated with

commercial production – administration and stud breeding – hinting at a gendering of the commercialisation of cattle production.

### **Non-fenced, communal grazing land in Charleshill sub-district**

Charleshill sub-district was characterised by non-fenced communal grazing land on which many farmers kept their cattle according to grazing rights obtained and issued by the local Land Board. The population in the sub-district is predominantly made up of Batswana, Bakgalagadi, Herero and San. When it came to selling cattle, most of the villages in the sub-district had a village *kraal* and loading facilities so that buyers could set up a cattle market and then load the cattle they had bought on to trucks that would take them to feedlots or butcheries. As shown in the narrative introducing this chapter, cattle owners took their cattle to the village *kraal* when buyers announced that they are coming. However, the more remote a village was, and the poorer the condition of the road, the fewer were the available market possibilities. Further, as the introductory story also showed, such sales were not always a straightforward matter.

Twenty-three of the women cattle farmers I interviewed with different sized herds kept their cattle on non-fenced communal grazing land in Charleshill sub-district, and four of these women had cattle on non-fenced village grazing areas. Kabomo, an older widowed Motswana woman, and Gendrede, an older Herero woman, both had their cattle herds on non-fenced communal grazing land outside the village areas.

Kabomo lived in Ncojane village, a couple of hours' drive on a badly corrugated gravel road south of Charleshill village towards the west of Ghanzi District. Her house was made out of cement blocks and although it had electricity, she cooked in her outdoor kitchen on an open fire shielded from the wind by a stick wall. While we cooked together, sitting on plastic chairs by the fire, combining her dried beans and spices with my vegetables and rice into an evening meal, she told me about her cattle. She spoke in Setswana and Thato, who is with me to translate, helped us to communicate.

Her herd of cattle, Kabomo explained, grazed at a cattle post a few kilometres outside of Ncojane village. She had hired a cattle-hand to stay there and see to the animals. He opened the gate to the *kraal* where the water was in the late morning and late afternoon, she told me, and made sure that all the cattle got to drink. He kept track of how they were doing and would notice if one had gone astray. As there were no fences around her cattle's grazing land, they could walk away at any time, but usually came back home when they got thirsty. Sometimes a younger male relative

would help out, if her hired cattle-hand needed to go away. When her former employed cattle-hand quit, it took some time to find a new one.

Kabomo herself went to visit the cattle post every week, to make sure that everything was all right, to bring supplies to the hired hand, and simply to spend some time at the *kraal*. She used to go with her husband to the cattle post when he was alive, and so she knew a good deal about cattle farming, Kabomo told me. The cattle were under her control and she decided herself what animals to sell and when. The hired cattle-hand however, had the right to milk the cows for his own consumption. Kabomo also went to the cattle post when it was time to vaccinate the cattle, or to oversee other procedures such as selecting cattle to sell. She did not sell enough cattle at any single time to get the BMC truck to come and fetch them from her *kraal*, but paid someone with a small truck to come and take them to the market place whenever a buyer advertised a market.

Another day, north from Kabomo's house, Thato and I sat down outside a small house built of cement blocks and circled by a low fence made of sticks to talk to Gendred, an old Herero widow. We travelled a good two hours on a wide sand road to the north of Charleshill village to reach Gendrede's house that lay not far from her *kraal*. Typically, the Herero women in this area live close to the *kraal*, I was told, unless they were wealthy and could afford to have a house in the village and employ cattle hands.

Although it was not yet noon that winter morning, the sun was warm and we sought out the shade. Her house was a small cement square without electricity or running water, and sparsely furnished. Gendrede, in her horned hat, characteristic of married Herero women, wore a long dress that reached her feet and had long arms and a high neck. The dress was said to be inspired by those worn by missionary wives from around the turn of the twentieth century.

She told us that her herd of around twenty individuals were out grazing on the *veld*, out of sight. Later they would come in to drink at the watering hole close to Gendrede's house. Gendrede told us that her children used to help her take care of the cattle, and water them, but now they were in school. She had hired a man to help her, as she was now too old to walk far, or to catch the cows and tie up their hind legs when it was time to milk them. It was not always easy to find a reliable cattle-hand, and young boys went to school nowadays. The milking she did herself, as is customary for Herero women, she added, and she turned some of it into sour milk by letting it stand in the shade for a few days. Her husband, who used to take all the decisions concerning the cattle, died some ten



years ago and since then Gendrede herself had managed the herd. She saw them twice a day when they come to drink. When she needed to vaccinate them or take them to the market, her children would come to help, but the cattle were under her control and it was Gendrede herself who decided what cattle to sell and when.

However, contrary to the general understanding of widows' cattle ownership discussed earlier in this chapter, Gendrede explained that cattle would not traditionally be left to the widow, but instead would be inherited by one of the sons. As the family usually lived together, everyone would still benefit from the cattle, she explained, and the sons would of course support their mother. These days, Gendrede explained, families no longer lived together and sons would quarrel over who should get the cattle. Therefore, she decided to keep the cattle herself.

Cattle production at Kabomo's and Gendrede's *kraals* were gendered in that they both claimed control over the herds only when their husbands had died. However, they were gendered differently in that Gendrede used to engage in the hands-on cattle tasks when she was younger, whereas Kabomo's herd was always tended by a male cattle-hand. Today their engagements are similar, save for the milking that Gendrede does herself for her own consumption. In the following chapters I show how the way that widows benefit from their cattle varies, as does their motivation to keep cattle. I also show how Herero women's property relations to cattle vary.

On the fenced and non-fenced grazing land across Ghanzi District, the daily life of the cattle and the daily tending of the cattle was, as we have seen, similar. However, farmers on non-fenced land faced greater challenges to access the market, as the story at the beginning of the chapter showed, and the level of material welfare as well as the way that women are involved differ. Further, it is not only widows, Hereros and 'rich, white' women who are involved in cattle production in Botswana today, as I will show, and in the next section I discuss how women have different starting points in terms of access to technology, capital, labour and the market, providing them with different starting points from which to face the opportunities and challenges in cattle farming. Thus access to labour, technology, capital and markets differs greatly among women cattle owners in Ghanzi District, and access was to a large extent mediated by social identity linked to historical property relations based on gender, ethnicity, race and class and often accessed through other social relations such as through marriage or kinship (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

## Different starting points for women cattle owners in Ghanzi

The forty women cattle owners interviewed are all self-identified cattle owners. However, their property relations and access to their cattle differ. Twenty-six had independent ownership with their own registered brand recognised by the state, and eleven were in co-ownership with their husband. One woman used her mother's brand, one used that of her boyfriend, and one used that of her husband, while they all differentiated ownership with earmarks. Although this allowed them to recognise claims to different animals, it was the brand owner who controlled the sales, as we saw in the story at the beginning of the chapter.

Land tenure, herd sizes and labour relations varied among the women I met in Ghanzi. So did the ways in which they acquired their cattle, as I show throughout the following chapters. Inequalities in terms of ethnicity, race and class discussed on a national level in chapter 4 are to some extent also present among the women cattle owners that I interviewed. All of the women cattle owners I interviewed with cattle on freehold Ghanzi Farms had acquired their land as gifts from their parents or as inheritance from husbands. This group was made up of all the English and Afrikaner women in my sample as well as one Mokgalagadi woman. These women have different herd sizes, but all Afrikaner and English women belonged to a higher class of wealthy families, so even those with smaller herds had a comfortable material living standard. Five of the women with cattle on tribal land in Charleshill sub-district had their cattle on leasehold fenced farms (or had access to leasehold farms in times of drought). They were Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero women with different sized herds and their access to grazing land was mostly mediated through other social relations. Two of these women used grazing land where the leases were registered by husbands, one by a boyfriend and two by parents, and one woman was allocated land herself by the Land Board. In this way, even the women with smaller herds had gained access to fenced grazing lands, albeit sharing it with others.

Nineteen of the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero women I interviewed grazed their cattle on non-fenced, communal tribal land and one on the village grazing area. Six of these women had gained access to water and grazing land by registering a borehole syndicate together with their husbands and relatives. Five had access to grazing land through their husbands, five kept their grazing land rights when their husbands died, and two shared grazing land with relatives. Thus, the more attractive forms of property relations to non-fenced grazing land were accessed through husbands or male relatives, showing how such property relations are not only mediated through class but also gender.

Property relations to land are shaped by Botswana’s colonial heritage, where descendants of the European elite still have private property rights to freehold land and access to leasehold grazing land, with private usufruct rights for non-European cattle farmers being limited to those with larger herds, as we saw in chapter 4. Access to grazing land for the forty women cattle owners that I interviewed followed these patterns to a certain extent, as the table below shows.

*Table 2. Land tenure of the women cattle owners.*

	Fenced Freehold land	Fenced Rented Freehold land	Fenced Leasehold tribal land	Communal Tribal land	Communal Village grazing area	Total
‘White’	9	3	0	0	0	12
‘Black’	1	0	4	19	1	25
‘San’	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	10	3	4	19	4	40

The kind of property relations farmers have to land has an impact on cattle management practices. The fact that Elisabeth, from the narrative at the beginning of the chapter, had a fenced property increased her chances of ensuring that all of her cattle have boluses inserted in their stomachs at the time of sale, as she knows where they are at all times and can collect them easily when the DVS officers come. The fences also increased the chances that they will obtain sufficient access to grass and water to put on enough weight to wield a decent price at the weigh-in. Further, it is easier to control calving seasons as she can separate the bull from the cows and heifers at will. With most of the calves born around the same time, it is easier to administer a larger sale that in turn reduces the proportionate cost for transport, as well as the time and effort it takes to go through the sale procedure.

Unequal access to capital, in this case in the form of cattle and grazing land, technology, here in terms of fences, and labour as Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, shape the conditions under which the women cattle farmers operate.

For all Tswana and Kgalagadi women interviewed, except one who sold fish and one who had newly started her herd, the cattle were their main livelihood and source of monetary income, although for some, piece jobs, crops, small stock production or a butcher’s shop supplemented their livelihoods. For the three Nharo women, cattle were the only alternative potential income besides drought relief programmes or dependence on their

relatives. For all the Herero women, except for two who were also wage labourers doing administration or cleaning at the Rural Administration Centre (RAC) in Charleshill village, one of whom also had goats, cattle production was their main livelihood and only source of monetary income.

Except for three of the Afrikaner and English women on the Ghanzi farms – one of whom was a wage labourer, one ran a butcher's shop, and one was a student supported by her mother – live cattle sales represented their main livelihood and source of income. Some of these women also had businesses on the side, such as stud breeding, a hardware store or vegetable plantation, and some also kept goats on the farm. The Afrikaner and English farmers were thus all part of the wealthiest group in Ghanzi, and belonged to the highest class of cattle owners. The Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero, with larger herds and fenced grazing land, could be counted as being members of the higher wealth classes (Bolt and Hillbom 2013a), although while Batswana and Bakgalagadi women that I met lived and socialised together, the Herero women made up a more distinct community.

Although Afrikaner and English women were to some extent part of the same 'white' high class community, they mingled more amongst themselves than between ethnicities. Sometimes, race became important in relation to others, while at other times, it was ethnicity that was highlighted. This was also done through hierarchies of class, as class was racialised, as discussed above. Again, gender is brought to the forefront in combination with ethnicity, race and class, shaping what is seen as appropriate and reasonable for men and women to do, as I discuss further in chapter 6. Thus multiple dimensions of social relations interact (McCall 2005) so that relations to others emerge out of different social processes in an ongoing and interactional manner (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Along which axis that boundary work (Kent 2002) is done thus varies.

The majority of the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero women I interviewed lived under poorer material living standards with small cement houses and less material goods, and belonged to lower social classes than the English and Afrikaner women. Some, however, with larger herds were part of a wealthier strata and a higher class. The Nharo women I interviewed were all part of the lower wealth and social class with poor material living conditions. In addition, having the money, from cattle sales or otherwise, to buy feed for the cattle in times of drought or to send them to the feedlot to reach the ideal weight for sales also makes a difference to the ability to benefit from the cattle.

The women farming on communal land in Ghanzi District who said that they sold cattle told me that they sold either to the BMC, Marie's

feedlot or to other ‘whites’, referring to other cattle agents functioning as middle men to the BMC. Farmers on large freehold farms, predominantly white, contracted the feedlot to fatten their cattle from time to time, and also bought feed for the cattle in their own *kraals*. Although the weaner production system, focusing on selling calves at weaning age, does not intentionally set out to favour some groups over others, it does play into the hands of those with opportunities to secure enough feed or grazing to produce heavy weaners, as well as the feedlot owners making a profit out of being middle men to the BMC (GoB 2013). It is in a sense a situation where those with a more privileged starting point in terms of capital can benefit from the feedlot system that encourages export beef production, while those farming under poorer conditions find it harder to compete.

As Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, access to capital is crucial in order to be able to benefit from a natural resource, in this case cattle. In a sense, cattle can be thought of as both resource and capital, but as we shall see later in this chapter, a large herd size represents something different than simply more resources, as size in itself affects both herd growth and how the herd is affected by removing individuals from the herd, when selling them for example. As we have seen, access to land and cattle and grazing land, and thus class, is influenced by gender, ethnicity and racialisation. In this way, interlinked processes of power articulate historically situated property relations to land and cattle (McCall 2005). Further, they also shape farm labour relations in Ghanzi.

### **Labour relations linked to gender, ethnicity, race and class**

Access to farm labour in Ghanzi is also defined by historically situated social relations shaped through cattle production. Christine declared to me that she would not know what to do without Xgaiga, and that she would always take good care of him and his family. She tells me the story of how she went with one of her Nharo-speaking employees to the healthcare centre when she fell sick, in order to make sure that she got proper care and was not discriminated against because of her ethnicity. Through stories of the initial encounter between Afrikaner settlers and Nharo inhabitants with an emphasis on a shared love of the land, Christine described the unequal property relations and labour relations of Afrikaner, or ‘Boer’ and San, who were often referred to as ‘Bushmen’ in Ghanzi as being natural and unproblematic:

C: When the settlers came in to Ghanzi they encountered the Bushman. I think it's a symbiotic relationship between the Afrikaner and the Bushmen; they were drawn to each other. I think it's more something about the way they live. That's why they.. it's like magnets. You can't take away the Bushman, what are we going to do? You can't take us [the Afrikaner] out of the equation, what about the Bushman? We are dependent on each other and I don't think that it would end in the near future – I'm sorry. [Laughs]

A: Would you want it to end?

C: I don't think so. You know [...] It goes back to that kind of nature's child. We as Afrikaner farmers, we are also connected to the land as are the Bushmen. (interview 5 August 2013, Ghanzi town)

Through such stories, claims to land and labour become reasonable (Fortmann 1995). They were cooperating in Christine's view, and now live in a mutually beneficial relationship. However, while she emphasised both her dependence on the San employees and their similarities in that they were both connected to the land, there was also an unspoken rule concerning the hierarchical nature of their relationship. Both ethnicity and race become important here, as Christine draws on perceived differences between both 'whites' and 'Bushman' (Bhavnani 2001, Ballard 2002) and at the same time appealed to the connectedness of the land that was associated with both the San and the Afrikaner, or Boer. Class hierarchies tied to property relations are in this way painted as 'natural' differences between groups of people by alluding to race (Sundberg 2008). Both 'race' and 'nature' were here made important in terms of how they have been related to each other throughout history (Moore et al. 2003).

The relationship between Xgaiga and his family and Christine and her family was characterised by both closeness and distance. While Christine praised Xgaiga for his cattle skills, reliability and his attitude to life, an unspoken rule made sure that he never went inside her house. "They don't like us sitting on their furniture" (field notes 7 May 2013, Ghanzi Farms), explained Ditiro, the San man who was my translator, when he refused to come with me into an Afrikaner woman's house for tea.

Christine's take on a mutual, historic dependency is in some ways reflected in Russell's (1976) as well as in Russell and Russell's (1979) reflections over early relations between 'Bushman' and 'Boer' in Ghanzi, as discussed in chapter 4, where emphasis lies on the similarities between the Afrikaner and the African lifestyles rather than their roles as colonisers. It also reflects Guenther's (2015) understanding of the San-Afrikaner relationship as one of 'racial paternalism' and an initial symbiosis.

When Thamae told his story, emphasis was on the abundance of food and the freedom of the life before the fences in Ghanzi, in sharp contrast with the scarce resources available as a cattle-hand today. When he was a young boy, he and his family lived in the area, he told me, hunting wild game and collecting roots, nuts and plants for food. When they were no longer allowed to hunt on the land and water sources outside of the farms became scarce, they came to live on the farms. However, he did not like it, he says, because he had nothing of his own and was unable to build something for himself.

His story, then, starts before Christine's story in time, and naturalises different property relations (Fortmann 1995) than Christine's story does, emphasising instead how they had been denied their longstanding access to the land. His and his family's property claims to the land were thus not sanctioned by the socially legitimate institutions of the new colonial elite who had the power to enforce or deny them (Sikor and Lund 2009) and without their claims being legally and socially recognised and enforced by an external legitimised authority (Agarwal 1994b), they lost their rights to the land. Race was here constructed together with the environment and bound up with ideas about 'nature' and what were seen to be appropriate relations to it for different people, defining resource allocation (Sundberg 2008). Further, class relations were simultaneously constructed as the denial of Thamae and his family's claims to access to the land made them dependent on Christine's family and their neighbours, creating readily available labour for them. Moreover, the relations were gendered as only men were employed as cattle-hands at the *kraals*, with their wives expected to take care of their household and live off their husband's salary and rations.

The hierarchy between the Afrikaner and Nharo people I met in Ghanzi was upheld even outside of formal working relations, so that Nharo people as a group were constructed and perceived as being on unequal terms with Afrikaners as a group. While Christine praised the qualities of the 'Bushmen' (San), it was clear that it was all right for her to engage with Nharo people differently than with Afrikaner or English people.

Further, when I tagged along with Magriet, Peter and other white farmers, I was always invited by white farmers to ride inside their trucks while the 'Bushmen' always rode on the back. When driving with an Afrikaner farmer and stopping somewhere for a visit, there seemed to be no need for 'us' to inform 'them' about the plan, and when 'we' came back after, for example, a forty minute coffee visit at a relative's house, the employees and other 'Bushmen' passengers rushed from the shade and jumped up on to the back of the truck. Without a word, the farmer and I got

in the air-conditioned front seat and drove off. This situation left me with an embodied experience of racial hierarchies and left me uncomfortable.

It is a mutual understanding of a hierarchical relationship expressed clearly by Ditiro's comment above, revealing that although he was not even an employee at the farm, he assumed that the Afrikaner farm owners did not want him – a 'Bushman' – inside their house. The apparent acceptance of the social hierarchy between Afrikaner and Nharo, between white and San, is also apparent in young Afrikaner Yolanda's comment on their relationship on the farm where she was raised: "They used to be our friends, but when we grew up they became our employees" (interview 4 December 2013, Ghanzi town). Yolanda's statement captured neatly the naturalised labour relations between Afrikaner cattle owners and San cattle-hands. It provided her and other 'white' women cattle owners on the fenced Ghanzi Farms with easy access to labour, facilitating their ability to benefit from land and cattle (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

Christine's and Yolanda's statements were grounded in historical socioeconomic relations that construct a world of inequalities, and identify identified Nharo-speaking people as being inherently different from Afrikaans or English speakers. The way that cultural distinctiveness coupled to race was used to differentiate between the two groups of people in a way that placed them at opposite ends of political and economic continuum (Hylland-Eriksen 1991, Ballard 2002) gave Xgaiga and Christine very different starting points and possibilities. Additionally, the essentialist nature of certain characteristics attributed to the constructed ethnic category of Nharo made it possible for Christine to avoid a problematisation of this relationship, while also helping to normalise a situation of extreme inequalities. Other Afrikaner men were also hired as managers on Afrikaner-owned farms, and Batswana or Herero men and women were hired for manual labour around the homestead, though rarely living at the *kraals* like the Nharo employees.

Labour relations between women cattle owners I met in Charleshill sub-district and the cattle-hands taking care of their cattle varied. Among the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women cattle owners, male family members and relatives would often take care of their cattle in exchange for monetary or other compensation, but unrelated men were also employed. Similarly, among the Herero women I met that did not live full time at the *kraal*, it was common that family members or hired Nharo or Herero cattle-hands would take care of the daily tasks, while the women living at the farms would do most of the daily work of watering and milking the cattle themselves. The racial or ethnic divides between owner and worker were



thus fluid, unlike the strict racial and ethnic division on the Ghanzi Farms discussed above.

### **Fluidity and boundaries among black and white cattle farmers**

Talking about ethnicity and race in Ghanzi, it is worth noting the fluidity with which these distinctions were made at times. Although racialization and ethnicity can be rigid, there were times when historical inequalities and differences were not recreated through ethnicity, but rather similar cattle practices were highlighted to create an ‘us’ as between the Bakgalagadi and Batswana women cattle owners I met.

For example, although specifying that she was Mokgalagadi, Kagiso, who had a large herd of cattle on one of the Ghanzi Farms, spoke of ‘us Setswana speaking people’ (interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso’s farm, Ghanzi Farms) when she talked about cattle practices, but distinguished between how Hereros, Afrikaners and English as different, constructing an ‘us’ across ethnicities. Further, talking to a veterinarian working at the RAC in Charleshill about a certain woman whose cattle he had vaccinated in Ncojane, I asked if she was Mokgalagadi or Motswana. “It’s the same”, he said, “it’s almost the same” (field notes, 17 July 2013, Charleshill village).

Historically the Bakgalagadi have been considered as being low on the social hierarchy in the Kalahari and together with the San excluded from land allocation (Hitchcock et al. 2011), as discussed in chapter 4. People speaking Sekgalagadi dialects are today talked about in Ghanzi as ‘blacks’ together with those speaking different Setswana dialects. In Ghanzi today, Bakgalagadi men and women run stores, butcher’s shops and – as I shall come back to in the next chapter – head cattle operations on fenced farms. Further, stories about the past and ‘traditional’ practices are, as Fortmann (1995) notes, powerful tools in normalising claims to property relations. When ethnicity is tied to property relations to land and cattle, stories of relations to cattle are simultaneously stories of ethnicity. Telling stories about a way of life built around similar cattle practices and property relations to cattle as the Tswana instead of stories of a history of subjugation and lack of property claims similar to that of the San, the Bakgalagadi in Ghanzi were often reproduced as an ‘us’ together with Batswana, instead of emphasising historical differences.

The Herero were talked about by farmers of other ethnicities around Ghanzi as being different. Although Herero-speaking men and women were also constructed as being ‘black’ in Ghanzi, they were seen as having a different ‘culture’, as I discuss further in chapter 6. Whereas a distinction was made between Bakgalagadi and Batswana, the boundary

maintenance between them was not as noticeable as between these two groups and the Herero, the San or the whites. Herero speakers, on the other hand, were talked about by themselves and other farmers in Ghanzi as a completely separate group from the Tswana. The Herero men and women I met were sometimes constructed both by themselves and other farmers as foreigners in Ghanzi, because of their origins in Namibia. The Herero are renowned in Ghanzi for their stockmanship and their good eye for cattle, sometimes talked about by other farmers as probable cattle thieves and also seen differently, as I show in chapter 6, in terms of gendered division of cattle labour.

Although the Afrikaner and English are positioned together as ‘white’ and share privileged property relations to land and cattle as we saw above, language and history set them apart. The poorer members of the early Afrikaans-speaking groups in Ghanzi have been described as nomad pastoralists rather than farming settlers, coming into Ghanzi in 1894 (Guenther 2015). However, they gradually grew closer to the socially privileged English lifestyle (Russell and Russell 1979). Among the white women cattle farmers that I encountered, it was however clear that the two language groups were socially two separate although intermingling communities. However, in Christine’s account of the Afrikaner as nature’s child in the previous section, she was talking specifically about the Afrikaner, but when I asked her if the English were different she chose instead to say that the distinction was something that existed between farmers in Ghanzi and people in town.

## Conclusions

While women as a group are positioned in socio-symbolic terms (Rao 2008) as not engaging in cattle production in Botswana, there are three expected exceptions to this general rule, suggesting that widows, Herero women and ‘rich, white’ women engage in cattle farming. On one level, these exchanges challenge the rule, but on the other hand they confirm it by defining what does not conform as an exception. Such stories told about women’s relations to cattle undermine the idea of women’s property rights and strengthen men’s discursive claims to cattle (Fortmann 1995). These stories paint the picture that women never had cattle and were never interested in cattle, unless perhaps they were part of one of the three aforementioned groups.

It would appear that these were also the groups of women who engaged in cattle production, conforming to exceptions of the ‘rules of the game’

(Kandiyoti 1988, 1998), as shown in the examples in the second section of this chapter. While the daily practices around these cattle themselves were similar on the fenced and non-fenced grazing lands, the women cattle owners took different positions both in the cattle operations and in Ghanzi cattle production at large.

However, women in Ghanzi District also engaged in other ways, and the women in my sample were positioned differently in terms of access to fences, grazing land and cattle, labour and the market in ways that were gendered but also shaped by intersecting axes of ethnicity, race and class, defining how access is mediated by social identity and through other social relations (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Their access to resources to deal with challenges of drought, regulations linked to EU beef export and with breed management differs, as shown in the narrative at the beginning of the introductory chapter. In the next chapter I discuss how women also situated themselves in different ‘cultural traditions’ of cattle farming through which gender is done by both conforming to and challenging those ideas.



Watching cattle coming home. Photo: Andrea Petitt.



## 6 How gender is done by relating to cattle

### Introduction

Doing cattle farming is also doing gender, as discussed in chapter 2. Botswana's political history of cattle production positions women in Botswana differently in terms of access to grazing land and other prerequisites for cattle farming, as discussed in chapter 4, and women cattle owners in Ghanzi District keep cattle under different circumstances, as shown in chapter 5. Moreover, negotiations at intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class create distinct expectations on how women engage, or do not engage, in cattle production. In this chapter, I explore how ideas about who participates in cattle farming and in what way shape the visibility of women cattle farmers, how women cattle farmers themselves reproduce various traditions of gendered relations to cattle, and in what ways they actually engage in cattle farming. By looking at how ethnicity, race and class create distinct ways to do gender in relation to cattle, we can understand how different expectations of cattle relations shape the meaning of ownership. A nuanced picture of women's cattle ownership will in turn allow us to explore how expectations around women's engagement in cattle production are shaped by intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class which in turn places them in different positions *vis-à-vis* both men and cattle.

After an introductory narrative highlighting how women are simultaneously given visibility and made invisible as cattle farmers, I look closer at how women farmers in Ghanzi themselves formulate patterns of women's engagement in cattle farming, and demonstrate how three distinct groups emerge. I show how women cattle owners themselves recount three sets of expectations of how women relate to cattle: as either 'farmers' wives', 'milkers' or as 'distant' from cattle altogether. I discuss how stories

of ‘cultural traditions’ and ‘how it used to be’ (Rose 1994, Fortmann 1995) create socio-symbolic (Rao 2008) links to cattle in different ways and even normalise certain property rights and access to cattle assets. In this way, I show how the ‘gendered rules of the game’ (Kandiyoti 1988, Kandiyoti 1998) differ between communities of practice (Birke and Brandt 2009) in relation to women’s cattle ownership in Ghanzi.

The second section explores the ways in which women in Ghanzi are actually involved in cattle production and what kind of control they have over their cattle. I show how cattle ownership in practice can mean very different things and that women are in fact involved in cattle production in ways that both reproduce and challenge gender norms around cattle. While women face similar *de jure* possibilities of cattle ownership, I show that the way that they are commonly thought of and described as relating to cattle defines both opportunities and challenges in the possible pathway to having real control over the cattle they own (cf. Kandiyoti 1988, 1998, Agarwal 1994b, Jackson 2003, Rankin 2003, Rao 2008). I discuss why some women find it possible, and desirable to challenge gender norms by engaging independently in cattle production and claiming control over their cattle, while others do not, highlighting particularly the importance of marital status.

The third section explores tentatively in what ways women might gain a sense of worth or personhood from their various engagements with cattle. I ponder how the way that socio-symbolical links (Rao 2008) between women and cattle influences the creation of distinctly gendered communities of practice, allowing women who challenge the different ‘rules of the game’ to gain personhood in diverse ways.

In the concluding section, I discuss the implications of women challenging the expectations they face in regards to how they relate to cattle, for our way of thinking around gender relations in livestock production. Further, I ponder the importance of such expectations for women’s control over cattle and for gender relations in Ghanzi cattle production at large.

### **Narrative: *Kraaling* in stilettos - attending a cattle event focused on women’s challenges**

*In Gaborone I met Jester, a Motswana man who was the organiser of the meeting of the Southern Beef Farmers’ Association. He told me that the theme of the field day he was organising was called ‘Kraaling in stilettos’, and that its focus was to be on challenges faced by women in cattle production. ‘Kraaling’ means to put cattle in the kraal, the livestock*

*paddock commonly found at cattle posts. It was the first that I, and everyone else I knew, had ever heard of any formal cattle event in Botswana focusing on women.*

*A widowed Motswana woman had put her farm on the meeting venue-list a few years ago, and now that it was her turn to host the meeting, Jester wished to bring attention to the fact that she was a woman successfully running a cattle operation, and he therefore initiated the theme of the event. When I offered to present my project at the event, I received the response that there was no space for me on the agenda, and that it was too late to make any changes. However, I was told I would be most welcome to attend the event. When the day came I drove out early in the morning towards the farm, which was a three-hour drive from Gaborone. However, the organisers had not thought to ask the hostess about the suitability of dates, and because of her religious beliefs, she herself was not able to attend on this particular Saturday. The organisers had also changed the name of the day's theme to 'Women's challenges in cattle farming', as the hostess felt, according to Jester, that their first suggestion that mentioned stilettos made her sound like a fancy city lady; an image she did not approve of.*

*When I arrived, there was a very welcoming atmosphere, and as soon as I stepped out of my truck, Jester and a few friends came up to offer to help me with the flat rear tyre they had noticed. The meeting was running a couple of hours late, due to unclear causes, and in the meantime I was offered a seat with the elders, along with a can of coke. The circle of men sitting on well-used plastic chairs introduced themselves, and then continued to laugh and tell stories in Setswana. When I tentatively asked if they knew any female cattle farmers, the CEO of the BMC, who was there to speak at the meeting, told me that, "Maybe there are, but I don't see them" (field notes 30 November 2013, outside Sekoma). He explained that they did not keep gender-disaggregated records of farmers selling them cattle, and that they did not make any specific effort to support female farmers, if there were any. Similarly, the BMC PR manager told me later during the day that, "We don't really think about men and women" (field notes 30 November 2013, outside Sekoma). It thus seemed that representatives of the dominating actor in the national beef industry had not considered female cattle farmers. On the other hand, one of the elder men was quick to tell the story of how he had taught his wife to, "dehorn and to do everything with the cattle" (field notes 30 November 2013, outside Sekoma). He was proud to have such a competent partner. Apart from the host, none of them knew of any women who farmed*

*independently, but some were acquainted with women who were farming with their husbands.*

*When the meeting finally started, it was almost ten o'clock and the heat was already overpowering. The plastic event tent sheltered the crowd from the sun, but not from the heat, and water bottles were soon handed out. A quick scan of the agenda revealed a long list of male speakers. A few women sat in the audience, some introduced as officers at the local Rural Administrative Centre (RAC), but none of them spoke or was called upon to speak during the entire meeting. Instead, the men who held various capacities shared news on recent updates from the BMC, how drought relief was to be handled by the DVS and the latest developments in union politics. In other words, the topics that were discussed were the same as those at any other Farmers' Association event that I had attended, and none of the items on the agenda referred to the theme of women's challenges. So where were the cattle farming women?*

*When I had driven in, I had greeted a few middle-aged Batswana women who were busy cutting up half a cow, and I walked back to them to find out who they were, and to ask what they thought of the event. Two of them explained that they were cattle farmers. One of them had her own herd of cattle, and the other was farming with her husband. However, when I asked, they said that they personally did not know many female cattle farmers. When I asked why they were not attending the meeting, they simply answered that, "someone has to cook lunch" (field notes 30 November 2013, outside Sekoma). When I returned to the meeting, the opening speaker was deploring the lack of women cattle farmers, and was urging women to, "take the lead and get involved" (field notes 30 November 2013, outside Sekoma). Another speaker applauded the hostess for doing such a good job with improving her farm, and promoted women's involvement by pointing towards the beneficial effects they could have on both the cattle and the farm. He himself had observed that cattle posts where the wife stayed with her husband were often better developed structurally, and that the man was not as tempted to leave the cattle post the way a man who stayed there without a wife might be. During the rest of the meeting, women's involvement or challenges were not discussed specifically, and instead discussions focused on the usual issues of drought, BMC policy and practice, and the state of the beef market that I had heard at several farmers association meetings in Ghanzi. \**



This account shows two points of interest to our present theme: first, it illustrates how women's expectations of how women relate to cattle are in a sense contested by the organisers, and second, by focusing on the way in which the meeting was organised, it shows how expected gendered roles around cattle are reproduced even at such a meeting. This example may be seen as illustrating two potentially opposing trends within cattle production in Botswana. Firstly, it shows an emerging openness to the idea of women as cattle farmers in their own right. The fact that the actual theme of the field day was created, accepted and supported by its participants shows a crack in the widely cemented belief among decision makers of national and local cattle politics that independent cattle farming is practically an exclusively male domain. Secondly, it confirms that women are not yet recognised as independent actors in their own right in the cattle industry. The speakers at the meeting referred to cattle farming women as being exceptions, but also as important actors in supporting activities surrounding cattle ownership and management. They were also seen as *potential* actors who could take a lead in starting their own cattle operation.

That the few female cattle farmers who were actually present at the event participated in roles other than cattle owners or managers suggests that longstanding ideas about women's relations to cattle were being reinforced, re-enacted and strengthened, even as the meeting theme indicated that such ideas might be shifting in their cemented foundations. The two women cutting up meat for the event lunch did not push their status as cattle farmers, nor were they identified as such at the meeting. Likewise, a woman in the audience who was from the local Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) turned out to be a cattle owner, as I found out when chatting with her during refreshments. However, when she was introduced at the meeting, it was as a representative of the Division of Veterinary Services, and neither she nor the chairman offered the information that she was in fact a cattle farmer. Even at a meeting where the theme focussed on women cattle farmers, it was clearly not self-evident for either the men or the women to identify the women present who were actually cattle managers and owners. Nevertheless, I was spontaneously cheered on when I stood up at the 'any other business' slot of the meeting and shortly explained the focus of my project. Thus, although there might be a publicly-defined idea to encourage women to engage in cattle-rearing, the women who actually did so were not made visible.

### Three ways to be a woman through relating to cattle

As the narrative above shows, ideas about how women relate to cattle can be so strong that they influence who is noticed as a cattle farmer and who is not. Further, women also reproduce them actively, and conform to the norms they contain, otherwise the ideas might not be so robust. In this section I show how this is done by the women cattle owners themselves in Ghanzi District. Three general but distinct ways that women cattle owners themselves reproduced ideas of women's relations to cattle emerged throughout my fieldwork. These were reproduced through ideas about 'culture' and 'traditions' of 'the past' and functioned as a backdrop against which they understood their own and other's actual property relations to cattle. As different 'communities of practice' can configure gender differently in relation to practices tied to the same animal species (Birke and Brandt 2009), expectations of women's engagement with cattle diverge between communities. Different expectations and norms around what a woman should or should not do shape the ways in which possibilities are imagined, and as the 'rules of the game' vary, so too do the ways in which women might conform to or challenge these rules (Kandiyoti 1988, Kandiyoti 1998). While the women themselves drew on 'culture' and 'traditions' and thus ethnicity, as well as race, these relations were also reproduced through class and, as we shall see, marital status. The three ways that women drew on six different ethnicities to frame women in relation to cattle were as either *distant from cattle*, as *farmers' wives* or as *milkers*. As I shall show below, in all three groups women's expected relations to cattle were tied to women's assumed lack of independent control over cattle and subordination to men.

#### **Women as distant from cattle**

Women cattle owners that talked about women as *distant from cattle* drew on Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo ethnicities. The 'cultures', 'traditions' and 'pasts' referred to by these women situate women with no specific involvement in cattle production at all, and even as excluded from it, and thus *distant from cattle*. Although reproductions of ethnicity and race place Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women quite differently in other respects, as discussed in chapter 4, they all placed themselves as part of a history where women were not expected to have property rights to cattle or engage in cattle production.

The Mokgalagadi widow Kagiso's words shed further light on the expectation of women's relations to cattle:

To be seen as a visionary man or a great man, then you must have cattle. But with women, you know, women we were just dealing with household things and other things, so even if you were married and you did not have cattle, people wouldn't mind. But if you were a man and you don't have cattle, people ask themselves questions about you. (Interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso's farm, Ghanzi Farms)

Kagiso took over the *de jure* ownership and management of a fenced Ghanzi Farm and a very large herd of cattle when her husband died a couple of years before my visit, and her grown up children had already moved away. Having cattle was, in her opinion, the most valued type of project one could have. However, she notes that this was so for men particularly, while women could not be 'great', as they were expected to 'just' do housework. In other words, these culturally constituted cattle projects, in Ortner's (2001, 2006) terms, were not framed as valued for women (although men's cattle projects might be valued by women). Kagiso was clear about the way that women related to cattle in her culture:

The Hereros are different from us, the women are more involved in cattle farming there than men. It's their culture maybe [...] I think they [Afrikaner and English] are different from us, the Batswana, the Setswana speaking people, because they grew up with cattle [...] the Afrikaans speaking people grew up with cattle, that's why you see them a lot [...] they made their livelihood from cattle right from the beginning [...] the Afrikaans speaking were more staying in the farms, grew in the farms, they have never been in the villages, they have always been on the farms, so their children grew on the farms. [...] We just grew around the home, our activities are just around the home, the Batswana women, and our children, our girls, their activities are just around the home, whereas with our husbands, the men, the activities would be more at the cattle post and so forth. So the Afrikaans speaking women would be more knowledgeable on cattle than us. (Interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso's farm, Ghanzi Farms)

Here, Kagiso differentiated between herself and women of other ethnicities by the ways in which they relate to cattle.

When I asked Leano, a Mokgalagadi woman in her thirties, if women had cattle when she grew up, she said that "back then, women took care of goats; men were responsible for taking care of the cattle" (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill market, translated). Leano, who sold dried fish for a living that she brought to Charleshill from Maun where she lived, had recently bought two heifers that grazed on her boyfriend's fenced farm in Charleshill sub-district. It should be remembered here that although small stock was, and often still is, important to the survival of the family, and is

perhaps necessary for the reproduction of the cattle herd, the political, economic and symbolic meaning of cattle is unchallenged by any other animal in the country. Leano continued to tell me that “in the past women didn’t own cattle on their own. They would own cattle together with a man. Women were responsible for the household and men for the cattle”, (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill market, translated). In addition to the indices of change that these statements contain, which I shall explore further in chapter 7, they also say something about expectations of women’s property relations to cattle. Leano stated that Bakgalagadi women would not be in control of the cattle, even when the woman and her husband owned cattle together, but were instead responsible for the small stock.

Although there is no way of knowing from her story how much of women’s daily activity was interlinked with cattle production in the past, it clearly portrayed a picture of the ideas around women’s relationship to cattle and of the perceived expectations that steered gendered cattle relations. This means that even if women’s contribution were crucial to the reproduction of the prestigious cattle herd, their picture of themselves as Bakgalagadi or Batswana women was not dependent on working directly with the cattle. Women were instead expected to engage in childcare, cropping, small stock and housework. In this way, the way women’s relations to cattle were pictured in the socio-symbolic realm, in Rao’s (2008) words, did not place any kind of engagement in livestock production per se as integral to their role as women or wives (Håkansson 1994).

Similarly, the Nharo women that I interviewed drew on stories of the past, to clarify what was seen as Nharo women’s usual relations to cattle. Bao was a married Nharo woman in her fifties with a herd of five heifers. She lived in New Xanahas and her cattle grazed on the village grazing land. Apart from her cattle, government drought relief activities (by means of which individuals can receive small amounts of cash for manual labour in times of drought) or the occasional ‘piece job’ (individual, one-time tasks for which she is paid in cash) constituted her only potential income. Bao did not see a relationship to cattle as being part of the Nharo people’s history: “For us San people, there was no one with cattle – only the black people, Tswana and Herero, were having cattle”, (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated). Here, Bao described Nharo women and men as not having any specific traditional gendered relation to cattle, and drew on race when indicating differences between ‘San’ and ‘black’ people (Sundberg 2008). Sarah, an unmarried Nharo woman in her late thirties who also lived in New Xanahas, offered a similar view. She had five heifers of her own, a

boyfriend and four children. She told me that there were not a lot of women who had cattle when she was a child.

Although San were in this way constructed as distant from cattle, labour relations in Ghanzi place Nharo men as cattle-hands. Dao, Ncorague and Tom, all Nharo men employed cattle hands on Christine's farm, can be used to illustrate just how male some of the cattle tasks are considered on the farm.

Around dusk, my translator Ditiro and I set up camp and, following the sound of a guitar, we walked over to a group of six men preparing tea on the fire by a tree. We were invited to sit down and started talking about what men and women do respectively on a cattle farm. "Herero women might milk" Dao told me, "because it is in their culture" (field notes 18 May 2013, Ghanzi Farms, translated). In their own Nharo culture, Ncorague said, women do not milk. "But they are also ashamed", he added, "people would think that the man was mad at her for asking her to do work that she normally did not do" (ibid.). I asked what they would think about a man who did not want to milk, and Tom said that there was actually such a man in their camp, and that "he is part lady [...] A real man should milk cows" (ibid.). Although Bao and Sarah do not construct Nharo women as having any particular relation to cattle, it is clear that they are today part of the larger national cattle production network where men are placed closer to cattle than women.

What it means to be a woman is shaped through gendered power relations built on cattle practices where they are denied property relations and access. A shared and accepted understanding of certain traditions shapes the possibility of owning and/or controlling cattle by legitimising and sanctioning certain types of claim with reference to historical 'facts' (Sikor and Lund 2009). In both material and social terms, then, these women are both placed and place themselves as subordinate to and dependent on men in ways directly linked to cattle. Thus their access and their ability to benefit from cattle (Ribot and Peluso 2003) in ways that are not dependent on men have been limited. This, it should be remembered, is the women's own construction of their traditions and women's realities in the past, although we recognise the picture from the literature discussed in chapter 4.

The Batswana and Bakgalagadi women that conformed to accepted formulations of traditions were widows or separated older women with their own herds. Although women were framed as distant from cattle within their culture, widows were an acknowledged exception, and two of the older Bakgalagadi women interviewed stated that it was also common to divorce in old age and keep some cattle. Any Nharo woman who conformed to the idea of women (and even Nharo people more generally) as being distant from cattle would not be cattle owners at all, and so in my sample of

women cattle owners, all three of the Nharo women challenged this idea. The married Batswana and Bakgalagadi women I met who conformed to the idea of women as distant from cattle did not consider themselves cattle owners, and thus did not fit my selection criteria to become core informants. However, I did spend several days on a few occasions with Mpho at her husband's cattle operation on fenced leasehold grazing land a few kilometres outside Charleshill. Although she enjoyed coming with her husband to the farm and being around the cattle, she was quite happy to stay behind in Kang, mostly in order to spend time with her grandchildren. Even though it was her husband who took management decisions and also decided which cattle to sell and when, he was quick to agree with her suggestion to gift me a white Brahman calf.

### **Women as 'farmers' wives'**

Both Afrikaner and English women cattle owners expressed expectations that women should follow a tradition of playing supporting roles on the family cattle farm. This was connected to being 'white', and to the higher economic living standard associated with whiteness that stems from historical class structures based on property relations to cattle and land (Bolt and Hillbom 2013a), combined with a sense of class that perceived manual labour as being unsuitable for women. Although the Afrikaner and English women are placed differently in the colonial history of Botswana, as we have seen in chapter 4, they constructed similar gender relations in their ways of relating to cattle and the family farm. As we saw in chapter 5, Afrikaner farmers are constructed by other farmers in Ghanzi, as well as by scholars and by decision-makers at the Ministry of Agriculture, as farmers among which women to some extent might also be 'cattle people' and more involved in cattle farming.

When talking to the Afrikaner women themselves, they often made a distinction between being part of cattle farming, whilst not being actively engaged with the cattle or with cattle activities *per se*. They would refer to themselves and each other as wives or '*farmers' wives*'. Amongst other Afrikaans-speaking women with cattle, Yolanda and Chantelise, who owned large cattle herds together with their husbands on the Ghanzi Farms, found cattle farming to be a natural part of their lives, although it was not self-evident for them that they should take the lead in the cattle activities. Yolanda, a young Afrikaner woman whose father had recently given her thirty head of cattle, found that "there are not many young white women farming, but a lot of women are helping their husbands", (interview 4 December 2013, Ghanzi town). What Yolanda pointed out was that among

her social group, or what she referred to as ‘white people’, it was common for women to *help* their husbands with the cattle farming. Thus, she saw the young Afrikaner women generally as being connected to the cattle farm, but not in charge of it. In her own case, however, she had her own herd that she herself decided over, without her fiancé’s involvement. However, after they got married, she planned to sell her cattle in order to start a stud breeding operation together with her husband.

Wendy and Peter, an English middle-aged couple, owned and ran a cattle operation on one of the Ghanzi Farms together with one of their sons. They believed that ‘white’ women who were married to farmers were actually less involved than they used to be. Wendy said that she does not think that young women today are as involved as she was. “I think that they are more concentrated on that [getting kids to school] than to help their husbands on the farms. I’m sure that all helps with the finance, the books and shopping” (29 July 2013, Wendy and Peter’s farm), Wendy suggested, referring to how she would help her husband with tasks around the farm. Today young women had careers and their own lives, as she saw it, even if they were married to a farmer. “It is changing definitely” (ibid.). She painted a generalised picture of the English women in the past as actively engaged in cattle farming as helping wives, although not necessarily part of decision making or farming independently. She identified a division based on race and class in discussing women’s cattle relations, where ‘white’ women were supposedly not involved. The ‘finance and shopping’ referred to were clearly linked to a certain standard of living, and the membership of a certain class. Although these explanations do not necessarily reflect the stories of the Batswana and Bakgalagadi women, it does tell us something about how Wendy perceived gendered cattle relations in her own English community.

These women further saw themselves as an ‘us’ or ‘whites’, consisting of Afrikaner and English who were different from other cattle farmers in Ghanzi. They identify a supporting role for women as farmers’ wives, sometimes together with the possibility of being involved in joint decision-making as the norm, whereas independent management was seen as exceptional. Their ‘culture’ thus defined them as being farmers, but doing so by taking on the specific role of the supporting and ‘good wife’. In this way, the reproduction of ethnicity thus placed women within cattle production, in contrast to the women ‘distant’ from cattle in the section above, and ‘farmers’ wives’ were thus socio-symbolically associated with cattle farming as supporting wives (Rao 2008). Amongst the farmers’ wives, the culturally valued project of cattle production (Ortner 2001,

2006) was constructed as a family endeavour, where women and men have different tasks and responsibilities. In this way they placed themselves as women within the realm of cattle production, but in subordinate positions. Marital status was thus central to the ways these women reproduced cultural traditions and what it meant to be a woman.

Valued farming tasks for Afrikaner and English women, as highlighted through gender, ethnicity, race and class, consisted of supporting on-farm tasks, such as administration, child and house care as well as grocery shopping. Such tasks were mainly applicable to higher class groups with larger herds and commercial production who could afford grocery shopping (including shopping to provide rations for workers) that was sufficiently large to make it a time consuming endeavour. Certain cattle-related tasks, although not including physical presence among the cattle themselves, were thus integral to reproductions of Afrikaner and English female gender, as was the idea of being a wife. In this way, men and women were thought of as being linked both through the union of marriage, and through the family project of cattle production. As such, being a 'farmer's wife' might be seen as an intrinsic characteristic, or role, and in a sense non-negotiable in these women's gender productions (Håkansson 1994).

Further, portraying cattle production as a family project with no other real livelihood strategy could position women in more favourable positions in terms of property relations and access to cattle assets, at the same time as being more dependent on the cattle. In this portrayal of cattle traditions, women have discursive claims to cattle assets through their engagement in the family farm, even if their tasks themselves have less to do with cattle per se. As the villagers' stories in Fortmann's (1995) account highlighted their history of access to certain farm lands in Zimbabwe, the accepted descriptions of history and culture that this group of women draw on tell them that it is the men's responsibility to take care of their wives, something that can be seen as a set of discursive strategies to sanction their claims to cattle assets.

These descriptions of culture were also reproduced in practice by some of the 'farmers' wives' that I interviewed. Wendy found cattle farming to be both a burden and a pleasure: "I have mixed feelings", she says, "I enjoy it, but then there are a lot of issues. If you just work for a salary I think you'd have a lot less issues and difficult times" (interview 29 July 2013, Wendy and Peter's farm). While they discussed solutions to challenges together, it was Peter who did the cattle management per se, together with one of their sons. Wendy, on the other hand, focused on the financial tasks. Wendy did not think of her involvement in cattle farming as something



exceptional: “It’s just something that you do, it’s your life. I’ve done it for 40 years, I’ve been married and had cattle, it’s nothing that I think about” (ibid.). She used to participate in the hands-on cattle work when she was younger, but nowadays she said that she did not “enjoy the dust” (ibid). These days she ‘did the books’ and managed the economy of the farm as well as participating in brainstorming around challenges. Cattle farming was for Wendy also in practice a family project and a way of life that she enjoyed, even though she found it difficult at times.

Danielle, an older Afrikaner woman married to Jack, one of the first farmers in Ghanzi and one of the largest landowners in the region, also took on a supporting role in the cattle operation managed by her husband but she would have liked to have been more involved and even have her own herd. “Jack thinks it would be too complicated with two brands on the farm, too much administration [...]” (interview 12 December 2013, Danielle and Jack’s farm) she said, raising her eyebrows at the injustice. Jack, who sat next to her, nodded quietly with a serious expression on his face. Although Danielle did not explicitly say that she would have liked to farm cattle on her own if her husband was not around, she did express an interest in being active with her own herd while farming together with her husband. Yet, it was open and accepted between the two of them that her husband was allowed to decide on that matter, even if it was against her wishes. Danielle described (in front of her husband who kept nodding) how she deplored this:

It doesn’t help that I am interested, I was not allowed to have my own bull or cows for Jack [...] While a wife cannot decide on when to kill a cow, she is the one that has to do all the work with the meat once it is dead. A wife would supervise or look after sheep, because they are for the household, but would not get involved in the cattle. (Interview 12 December 2013, Danielle and Jack’s farm)

In Danielle’s case, it was out of the question to be active in the management of the cattle farm, or to have her own cattle, because of her husband’s refusal. Although she officially co-owned the livestock with her husband, she was in no way allowed to treat the cattle or the cattle operation as her own. In other words, Danielle felt the pressure of the gendered prescription for women to obey a husband’s wishes, and to take up the supporting activities of doing ‘all the work with the meat’ but restrain from engaging actively in the cattle management. Translating her own experience of subordination into general terms of what it means to be a wife, Danielle

defined her situation as normal, and in this way reproduced the idea of the Afrikaner woman as a supporting ‘farmer’s wife’.

Hazel, an English-speaking woman from Zimbabwe, where her grown up children still lived, was in a similar situation: “I like cattle, but Stuart likes me to be in the background – I mean we go around together and discuss, but my role here is very minimal. Not like on the [farm in Zimbabwe]” (interview 30 October 2013, Hazel and Stuart’s farm). There, Hazel would be involved in the crop farming and with the ostriches, but here in Ghanzi, she said that the challenge was the loneliness, and she added that “my life is quite boring [...]” (ibid.).

Before moving to Botswana, Hazel and her husband Stuart had a crop farm in Zimbabwe, where they farmed different vegetables as well as ostriches. When the land reform in the 1980s was put into action, their farm was taken from them, and they decided to move. Eventually they rented one of the Ghanzi Farms, and now they operated a cattle production with a few hundred animals. Stuart did not want her to engage more in the management of their cattle farm, and so she did not. As a result, her life was ‘quite boring’. However, when they were farming crops together, Hazel did not feel that she had to be in the background of the farming management, as she pointed out, but her husband insisted on her taking a peripheral role when it came to cattle farming. The gendered pressure on Hazel to resign herself to the wishes of her husband coincides with a gendered division of labour in relation to cattle farming that we recognise from the other women’s stories above. For Hazel, Danielle and Wendy, their main tasks were to supervise the hired cowhands and to manage the economy of the farm, although they ‘helped out’ wherever was needed. “If something happens to him”, Hazel hypothesised, “I could run the farm, I know how everything works and I’m good at delegating” (interview 30 October 2013, Hazel and Stuart’s farm). Gendered construction of Afrikaner and English women on the Ghanzi Farms encouraged them to subordinate their own desires to those of their husband, although the women followed these norms to different degrees.

### **Women as milkers**

The women I met who identified and experienced expectations on them to engage in practical daily cattle tasks were all Herero. As previously discussed, the Herero are regarded as ‘cattle people’, both by themselves and by other farmers in Ghanzi, as well as by DVS extension workers and scholars. Herero women cattle owners themselves conveyed these norms, while talking about their own everyday experiences.

For Louisa, Kunouee and Hilya, three Herero women with cattle on non-fenced, communal land in Charleshill sub-district, their relations to cattle were expressed in terms of Herero ethnicity: “Women are involved in cattle farming, but more especially the Herero, we are milking” (interview 3 June 2013, Charleshill), said Kunouee, an older widow with her own cattle operation of around forty animals. Similarly, Louisa, who was married and lived north of Charleshill with a very large herd of cattle on communal land, explained that, “in our culture, the Herero, when we grow up, we grow up knowing that we are farmers, we always stay with cows” (interview 15 June 2013, north of Makunda, translated). She said that even the children knew that “we are depending on cows” (ibid.). Louisa told me that it was her husband who decided when and what cattle to sell and clarified that “everything in our culture is controlled by the husband” (ibid.).

Although Louisa’s husband gives her pocket money and makes sure that there is petrol in the car when he leaves, she underlines that “money for food and everything, he is the one who is controlling this [...] My husband says that he can’t give all the money to the woman because she will buy clothes [...]” (interview 15 June 2013, north of Makunda, translated). In spite of Louisa’s intense involvement with the cattle husbandry, and the herd’s and family’s reliance on her daily interaction with the animals, she was not in a position to take independent decisions about the herd or its assets. Further, she referred to her subordinate position relative to her husband as ‘cultural’. By talking about her own experience, Louisa explained her situation in terms of cultural norms, and although she thereby indicated that she knew there might be more equal gender relations in other groups, her own practical reality was subordinated to these norms.

Hilya, who was involved in cattle husbandry at the same time as having a paid job, echoed Louisa’s view of what it meant to be a Herero woman. Talking about decision-making, Hilya specified that “in our culture, Herero women look after the home, food, things like that, but the *kraal* is for the man [...] In our culture, Herero women look after the cattle, but can’t decide without talking to the man” (interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill). According to these women, both hands-on cattle work and subordination to men were both considered to be part of the Herero culture.

She further assured me that “You know, in the Herero culture, the house is looked after by the women, they stay at home and look after the cattle. If you ask which calf is from what cow, I will tell you, my husband will not know” (ibid.). Taking care of cattle was thus constructed as a woman’s task, and it was the women, including herself, who knew the biological and social relationships of the herd, even though she was working elsewhere

during the week and it was her husband and children who spent more time on the farm.

As such, daily cattle work was constructed as something that was expected of a Herero wife. Culture thus became a way of talking about women's cattle practices and ethnicity to make sense of differences in patterns of activities, reproducing boundary maintenance (Kent 2002).

With clear responsibilities, practical know-how and everyday caretaking of the herd, they were still very clear about formulating their subordination to men and lack of meaningful control over the cattle. They thus do not have equal relative access to cattle when compared to men (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b). As with the 'farmers' wives' discussed in the previous section, cattle production was formulated as a joint endeavour between husband and wife, but with very specific cattle-related tasks for women. Thus, although Herero women have a predefined place within the culturally constituted project (Ortner 2001, 2006) of cattle farming, heading their independent cattle operation is not sanctioned in their own constructions of their traditions.

The Herero 'milkers' who conformed to their ideas of 'traditional culture' were thus involved with the cattle herd. Louisa, the married Herero woman, stayed alone at the farm most of the time, taking care of the herd of around two hundred cattle that she owned together with her husband. Her children helped her, while her husband was often at their other farm across the border in Namibia. For Louisa, her role in her family's cattle operation was a culturally valued project (Ortner 2001, 2006), and one that was suitable for a married woman. She did not take part in decision making around cattle management, sales or income spending, and was thus not in control of the cattle she owns, but she found this to be normal.

Kavejamua was an older Herero woman who together with her husband owned a small herd of cattle grazing on non-fenced land. They farmed in a syndicate together with relatives where they all shared a borehole and a brand. She told me that she milked the cattle every morning, "and", she added, "sometimes I make butter" (interview 15 June 2013, Kavejamua's house, translated). The milking of cattle was seen as a crucial part of the family's resources and a necessary daily routine. In addition, besides requiring training, the hand milking was also dependent on catching the cow in the *kraal*, and then tying its hind legs together with leather string. Milking was thus a technical skill that must be learned, and was crucial to Kavejamua's practical engagement in her family's cattle operation. Her husband took all the decisions regarding the cattle operation, and her role consisted of household responsibilities and manual cattle labour.

## Women challenging 'traditions' of cattle relations

The closer I came to the cattle and the farmers in Ghanzi District, the more complex the picture became. Not only did more women own cattle than I had imagined – they engaged in cattle production in different ways and came from different groups, rather than consisting of the predicted exceptions of widows, Herero women or 'rich white' women that I had heard about from afar. As shown in the story at the beginning of this chapter, while women cattle farmers are made invisible even in settings where they are meant to be highlighted, they are right there, quietly challenging the ideas of how women relate to cattle, the stories of gendered cattle practices that the women in Ghanzi District reproduce as 'culture', 'traditions' or 'the past' stood in some cases in sharp contrast to the ways that they in fact did participate in cattle production.

Whereas eighteen of the women cattle owners I interviewed placed themselves as following one of the three ways that 'cultural traditions' placed women - as 'milkers', 'farmers' wives' or 'distant' from cattle, outlined in the previous section - twenty-two saw themselves as engaged in other, different ways. Although these three formulations of how cultural traditions place women in relation to cattle situated women generally as subordinate to men and without control over cattle, twenty-six of the forty women said that they in fact had independent control over their cattle. Another seven shared control over their cattle with their husband or uncle, and only seven said that their husbands were in control.

As shown in the table below, although Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women were thought of as 'distant' from cattle, fifteen out of sixteen had independent control over their cattle. Further, around half of the Afrikaner and English 'farmers' wives' as well as half of the Herero 'milkers' who were thought of as being connected to cattle farming in supportive and manual tasks respectively, had independent control of their cattle.

Table 3. Control over cattle.

	Own brand	Management and/or supervision	Decision making about sales	Decision making about income from sales	Control over cattle
Farmer's wife (12) (Afrikaner English)	5	4 independent 4 with husband	5 independent 6 with husband	6 independent 5 with husband	5 independent 6 with husband 1 no control
Milkers (12) (Herero)	6	6 independent	6 independent 1 with husband	6 independent 3 with husband	6 independent 1 with husband 5 no control
Distant (16) (Batswana, Bakgalagadi, Nharo)	15	14 independent	15 independent	16 independent	15 independent 1 no control

Whereas the assumptions of the Ministry of Agriculture staff, cattle sector experts, scholars and Gaborone residents were that Herero women and 'rich white women' could be possible exceptions to the rule of cattle as a male domain in Botswana, it was not necessarily the Herero 'milkers' or the Afrikaner and English 'farmers' wives' who in fact had independent control over cattle. Women in these two groups with 'cultural' expectations concerning involvement in cattle production in supportive roles, both challenged and conformed to these ideas. However, all but one of the women in the group 'distant' from cattle, consisting of Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women, had independent control over their herds, as I show below

### Challenging the idea of women as 'distant' from cattle

In New Xanahas, a couple of hours drive on back roads from Charleshill village, the cattle walked around the communal village grazing area. Bao, Sarah and C'goise, three Nharo women who had cattle roaming there, all received cattle as part of the government poverty alleviation initiative, in which people classified as 'destitute' in 'remote areas' were given five heifers each (Moreki et al. 2010). Whereas Bao's and Sarah's cattle had not yet multiplied much, C'goise's herd now contained twelve head of cattle. None of them had other means of subsistence or income, save for the occasional piece job and money from the government drought relief programme. Nor could any of them afford to hire cattle-hands. A son or young male relative helped out with keeping an eye on the animals, although the women made all the decisions themselves regarding herd management and sales. Although

other farmers often thought of Nharo people as distant from cattle because of ideas around the San ‘traditional’ practices of hunting and gathering, these three women had entered into cattle production as owners as a consequence of the poverty often associated with San people in Ghanzi, which qualified them for poverty alleviation support.

Elsewhere in Ghanzi District, however, other Nharo women had acquired cattle in other ways. Ncg’abe, for example, who lived in D’kar and made a living from performing traditional dances and making traditional jewellery out of crushed ostrich eggshells, had bought two heifers with the money she got from selling her crafts. These heifers stayed on a farm belonging to the bore hole syndicate of which she was a member, and family members of some of the syndicate members looked after the cattle there. These women controlled their own decisions concerning their small herds, including when to sell and how to use the money, but also in relation to strategic herd improvement. Bao would prefer to let her cattle multiply, and ensured me that, “it is only the few troubles that come up that makes me sell them. If you have enough cattle you don’t have to worry, whatever you are doing! You buy what you want to buy” (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated). Thus, these women’s traditionally expected lack of cattle ownership as constructed through race and gender had not prevented them from *de facto* cattle ownership and independent decision-making.

Botshelo, the Mokgalagadi woman with a fenced leasehold farm in Charleshill sub-district whom we met several times above, was in charge of the cattle on the farm that she ran together with her husband. Although she was a Bakgalagadi woman, we spoke mostly in English, and sometimes Thato translated from Setswana. Her husband lived in a town a few hours away where he managed another farm. Botshelo’s cattle with her own brand grazed together with her husband’s cattle on a fenced farm in Charleshill sub-district that was officially under her husband’s lease. It was Botshelo who managed the cattle and supervised the hired cattle-hands. She kept Sussex cattle because of the heavy calves that fetched a better price at the market, and mixed them with Brahman to obtain drought resistant animals, she told me. She decided herself what cattle to sell and when, although she asked her husband for advice sometimes, and controlled the income from her cattle.

Botshelo also ran her own butchery in Charleshill village, together with her sister who tended the store when Botshelo was on the farm. Every morning and evening she drove to the farm to see her cattle and to make sure that everything was in order. Whereas Botshelo placed herself within a culture expecting women to be distant from cattle, she was in control of her

own cattle and even managed her husband's cattle. With the means to keep a large herd under controlled grazing management, Botshelo's and her husband's joint efforts benefitted both of them. "Cattle are number one!" (interview 27 June 2013, Botshelo's farm) she said, and smiled as she stood by the fence while the sun set, watching her cattle as they came in to drink.

A couple of hours drive from Botshelo's farm, a few kilometres outside Ncojane village in Charleshill sub-district, Masego had her herd of twenty cattle. Masego was in her early twenties, single and her first language was Sekgalagadi, but she also spoke Setswana. She had not married and had no immediate plans to do so. She had applied for and received money from the Youth Development Fund (YDF), which had allowed her to start up her operation. She lived in a small cement house together with her adult nephew Lesego, who helped her with the cattle when she went on errands. The house lay some fifteen minutes' walk from her cattle *kraal* with the water trough. Apart from the *kraal*, around the watering hole, there were no fences preventing Masego's herd from scattering, and her Sussex cattle roamed freely on the *sandveld*, the vast open Kalahari sandy plains, grazing on whatever grass and brush was available. One afternoon when I went to visit Masego, I accompanied her to let the cattle in to drink from the water trough in the *kraal*. We leaned on the fence while they took turns drinking, and Masego explained which bull was grumpy and which cow was the mother to which calf. As the sun started to set, she opened the gate again and we watched the cattle disappear into the vast, flat, thorn bush country.

Lesego had milked a cow that morning, so when we come back to Masego's house after collecting firewood, we were able to have milk in our tea. Lesego often took care of the cattle on a daily basis, letting them in and out and milking a cow. The only other income any of them had was from 'piece jobs'. Although Masego had a precarious economic situation, and could not afford to eat proper meals every day, she would not consider selling or slaughtering any of her cattle, until they had reproduced and her herd growth had become well established. While Masego did not fit the typical image of a cattle farmer in Botswana, she owned and controlled her own cattle with the help of male labour. Young, unmarried and Mokgalagadi, she did not even fit into the common description of 'expected exceptions' regarding women cattle farmers, yet she managed the herd herself and was determined to keep her operation commercially viable.

These Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women, framed as 'distant from cattle', were clearly independently managing their own cattle, making their own decisions concerning both the herd, and how to spend the income accrued from it. Masego exercised her right to sign loan agreements, and all



of these women had their own, officially registered cattle ownership brand. Botshelo had her cattle together with her husband's, on a fenced farm officially under her husband's leasehold, but still exercised *de facto* property rights and independent control over the cattle, of which she had *de jure* ownership. Furthermore, in practice she also managed even her husband's cattle.

Whereas Botshelo had a relatively high living standard, with a fenced farm, a butchery and a husband who managed another farm in Lobatse, Masego struggled to find food for the day and often only had tea and milk for days on end. She would not consider selling a cow yet though, as she was committed to letting the herd grow so that she could pay back the loan and gain long-term economic security. Thus women in very different life situations had decided to own and manage cattle of their own and were doing so independently. It was not only within a specific age group, economic strata or marital status that Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women independently owned and managed cattle, but examples of women's independent *de facto* property rights to cattle emerged from different social positions in Ghanzi. In spite of the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women's self-identified 'cultural' subordination to men, and lack of association with cattle, they were independently managing cattle, arguably the symbolically most significant animal in the country, and made their own decisions concerning the herd in accordance with their own preferences and visions.

By relating to cattle in different ways than their associations with cattle were typically described in the socio-symbolic realm (Rao 2008), they were able to exercise control over cattle. Notably, a large portion of these women were either divorced, widowed or had never married, but in contrast to common assumptions that women, and specifically widows, enter cattle production because of inheritance, the majority of these women had made active choices to start a cattle operation. Perhaps diverging from the 'rules of the game' (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998) that are in part built up around a division of labour and defined responsibilities and property rights between husband and wife, is easier when not actually in a marriage.

### **Challenging the idea of women as 'farmers' wives'**

Afrikaner and English 'farmers' wives' have also challenged the cultural image where women engage in cattle production only in supporting roles. After having owned and managed a safari company for some years, Annelies, a married Afrikaner woman in her forties, decided to obtain a CEDA loan. She had, along with her siblings, been gifted a piece of her

father's fenced freehold land, and she wished to start her own cattle operation. Her husband worked as an engineer and was not involved in cattle farming. Annelies saw herself as an exception, being a woman and managing a cattle operation on her own.

However, this did not stop her from doing it, and she kept pursuing her dream: "I have always wanted to farm, that's why I came back to Ghanzi, I love farming" (interview 25 October 2013, Annelies' farm). Chantelise, introduced above and who moved from South Africa to Ghanzi to farm cattle with her husband, defined herself to be a bit of an exception as well, as she took part in the practical daily work on the farm. Although she did not take part in the decision making around cattle sales or how to spend the income, she thought that if people found out that she was involved in cattle management and daily practicalities "some feel maybe offended because [...] I think so, especially men. Even here I feel it much more than in South Africa" (21 October 2013, Chantelise's farm). Chantelise described her role on the family farm as directly linked to her role as a wife. Chantelise formulates expectations of an Afrikaner woman's role in terms of her being a wife:

I think if [my daughter] had the choice she would have gotten involved into cattle farming [...] but she has to support her husband [...] we are real [...] wives, we are supporting our husbands, not doing our thing on our own – I am the rebel! (Interview 21 October 2013, Chantelise's farm)

Of interest in Chantelise's description is – once more – the 'trick' of making women meaningless or invisible if they break the dominant rule of the game by being directly and actively involved with cattle production: again, this is done by framing them as exceptions. As in the introductory story of this chapter, she is engaged in ways not expected by tradition, yet she talks about her participation in cattle production as anecdotal. Because she saw herself as a rebel, and potentially a bit strange for being so involved with the cattle, she felt the need to be careful:

I'm not taking over so I do it in a quiet way and, I love to do it. They know me most of the women [...] I assist my husband and I'm not scared to do something if there's something to do [...] I feel sometimes too much involved in the farming [so that] my husband feels I want to take over. So I decided to start something in Ghanzi [...] I think about getting a small shop [...] (Interview 21 October 2013, Chantelise's farm)

Chantelise loved to be involved in cattle farming, and although she saw herself, as a woman, as breaking the unwritten gender rules, she still did not

wish to step on her husband's toes. This can possibly be understood as an expression of a strong feeling of gender control; a will to succumb to norms and expectations that were strong enough for her to give up doing what she loved. Further, it was clear that for Chantelise, there was a strong link between the perceived Afrikaner gender norms prescribing women to support their husbands, and the degree to which it was acceptable for a woman to take a managerial role in cattle production before she would be seen as 'taking over', 'a rebel', or simply 'not right'.

As Hodgson (2001) has shown, women who challenge gender norms can be seen as bad in different ways. Chantelise's reasoning over her role at the farm shows how such ideas can also be internalised, and that although she did challenge the gender norms, she herself regulated to what extent it was appropriate to do so without upsetting family relations. As Jackson (2003) suggests, this might have been her best option, as renegotiating gender relations as a married woman might be out of reach. Diverging from the 'rules of the game' (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998) might come at too high a cost, as her role on the farm was, the way she expressed it, integral and non-negotiable to gender relations as a wife (Håkansson 1994). However, it is also clear that not challenging these expectations to the extent she would have liked reproduced oppressive gender structures, as Agarwal (1994a, 1994b) points out. Although she judged actively participating in the cattle operation as a valuable project, it was not a project that was culturally valued for women in her community, and so she refrained from engaging to the extent she would have liked.

Like Chantelise, Christine, who we met in chapter 5 and who owns a large fenced freehold farm on the Ghanzi Farms Block, thought of herself as being different from other Afrikaner women because she was so actively involved in cattle farming:

The women do not understand why. Because I go in the vehicle with the guys and look at the cattle, and the women ask me, 'Why do you do that?' [...] They don't think I am well (pointing to the head, laughing). (Interview 5 August 2013, Ghanzi town)

Christine was convinced that other women did not wish to be as involved as she was: "Not in my community. They would still want the male to dominate the farming industry" (interview 5 August 2013, Ghanzi town). She called herself the '*boss of everything*,' but explained that these days she was more in charge of the stud operation while her husband managed the beef side of the cattle business. Elisabeth, however, did not think that others would have much to say much about her running her own cattle operation.

As we saw at the beginning of chapter 5, Elisabeth bought her cattle after she divorced her husband, and had been running it herself on fenced, privately held grazing land until a year back when her son returned from England to help her. She was delighted to be able to leave some of the management decisions and supervision of cattle-hands to him, now that she was getting older, but she retained overall control of the operation. These Afrikaner and English women found it unproblematic to be living on a farm and uncontroversial to be involved in farm life in the larger sense of the word, although they differed in the ways in which they acted in disjuncture with the 'rules of the game' (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998).

One of the themes in these women's stories concerns how much they experienced themselves as being restrained by the gendered norms they identified: whereas Annelies managed her cattle operation completely on her own, and Elisabeth was happy to get some help from her son, Christine was involved in those tasks she liked doing best, and Chantelise felt that she had to hold herself back so as not to 'take over'.

### **Challenging the idea of women as 'milkers'**

The Herero women who challenged the gender norms in relation to cattle that they themselves associated with their culture did so in two main ways. Firstly, by being more involved in management and decision-making around sales as well as exercising more control over expenditure than the narratives of 'Herero tradition' defining married or single women allowed and, secondly, by independently managing their cattle operations as widows, which they perceived as something rather new. Thus, these women had different property relations to cattle, as I show below, than would have been possible should their actual activities have adhered to the way they were associated with cattle in the socio-symbolic realm (Rao 2008).

Tjavanga was a young married Herero woman who had her own cattle herd with her own brand, managing them at her own cattle post separately from her husband. Her herd of around eighty animals was made up of exotic breeds such as Brahman, Simmental and the crossing of the two, Simbra. Tjavanga had taken an active decision to be engaged independently in cattle farming even though she was already farming cattle together with her husband. When she and her husband decided that they wanted more cattle, Tjavanga applied for a CEDA loan and bought eighty head of cattle with that money. Since their borehole could not support all those animals, she asked her uncle to run water using a hose from his borehole to the grazing area on communal land where they kept the new cattle. Tjavanga then began to run that herd by herself. "Now I manage this cattle post and

my husband manages the other. We are two heads of the family” (interview 3 June 2013, Charleshill village). With independent cattle management comes the position of head of household, a role usually associated with the husband. She saw herself as one of the few Herero women who managed their own herd by choice, and was proud of it: “Even [if I am married] I want to face my own things” (ibid.), she said, explaining that although she asked her husband for advice, she was learning to run the cattle post without his help. For Tjavanga, having her own herd was about something more than livelihood or fulfilling the role of a wife – it also made her head of the household together with her husband and gave her the satisfaction of handling her own challenges.

As discussed in previous chapters, widows’ relations to cattle are often perceived as somewhat different from other women’s cattle ownership. Solway (1988, 1992) noticed this among the Bakgalagadi, and we have seen that many contemporary accounts do so too. It was perceived as both expected and acceptable for widows to have cattle in Botswana, and that widows were often considered to ‘not count’ in the sense of being ‘women owning cattle’, since they were thought of as doing so out of necessity. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, Gendrede thought of Herero widows inheriting cattle as a recent phenomenon. The practice of a male relative inheriting a deceased husband’s wife had also changed in Makunda, according to the women, village chiefs and elders to whom I had spoken. However, as both Rejoice, another Herero widow with her medium sized herd of cattle on communal land, and Gendrede pointed out, families were more scattered today than they used to be, and Gendrede thinks that “there is no love at all, when people see you are progressing they start hating you” (interview 12 June 2013, north of Charleshill, translated). For this reason, Rejoice explained, she and other widows were holding on to their cattle after their husband’s death to avoid conflicts between sons about how the cattle should be distributed.

Gendrede assured me that there were many widows today who had their own herd, in contrast to when she was young, as before the whole family would stay together and share and support each other: “The difference these days is that women have to stand up when the borehole is broken, and take care of things themselves – it’s the life of today. You have to take care of yourself” (interview 12 June 2013, north of Charleshill, translated). Her impression was that women in the village who had their own cattle had no man to look after them, and thus were forced to live off their cattle. Although Gendrede and Eviline had control over their cattle, they were not happy about their situation and would have preferred to share the responsibility that the

operation entailed with a husband or family. Thus, owning and controlling cattle was not necessarily something positive. Not all women desired to own cattle, but did so because of circumstances out of their control. The changes in gender relations that these women portrayed have thus led to new challenges for them.

### **Who has control over cattle?**

While all the women in this chapter defined themselves as cattle owners, only those with control over their cattle had the same relative access to cattle as men (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b). Relative control refers to differences and similarities between men's and women's access to the key resource in question (ibid.). Women's positions relative to those of men and cattle, as created by gender, ethnicity, race and class, that together construct women as either 'milkers', 'farmers' wives' or 'distant from cattle' in some cases, may also limit their possibilities. The women in Ghanzi used stories of the past, culture and tradition to highlight expectations of gender roles that justified unequal types of relations to cattle. In this way, these discursive strategies asserted women *as women, and as women of a certain group* within certain patterns of gender roles.

Whereas Rao (2008) takes a step away from gender roles in her analysis of women's actual property relations and focuses on the notion of personhood, the way that women are socio-symbolically associated with cattle, as reproduced through stories, highlights gender roles. As Kandiyoti (1988) has shown, women facing different 'rules of the game' challenge such norms and act in disjuncture from perceived gender norms (ibid.). Among the women cattle owners I interviewed, a significant number thus challenged what they saw as 'normal' relations to cattle. Although women challenged 'cultural' expectations to being 'milkers' or 'farmers' wives', it is of particular interest that those pictured as 'distant' from cattle were the ones with the most independent engagement, individual ownership and control over cattle. When triangulating this finding in discussion with the *dikgosi*, or chiefs, in the villages in which I spent time, and with extension workers who regularly travelled to *kraals* around the district, exploring to what extent this was connected with the marital status of the women in my sample, I repeatedly obtained similar answers.

For example, one of the Batswana veterinarians who had been working as an extension worker for the DVS in Ghanzi since 1982, including Charleshill sub-district, and who had travelled all around the district, explained that he had met with increasing numbers of Nharo women with their own independent cattle herds. He had also met some Afrikaner and

English women who farmed independently but, however, the Herero women he had met who rear cattle independently were mostly widows, he noted, and when it comes to non-widowed women, “mostly it is the Tswana women who have their own brands” (interview 13 December 2013, DVS office Ghanzi). To what extent these observations are part of larger trends is a matter for future research.

The women interviewed faced different social challenges and opportunities. Although Herero women as well as white women were traditionally constructed as linked to cattle in a stronger way than the Batswana, Bakgalagadi or Nharo women, this did not necessarily facilitate their control over cattle. Instead, perhaps the lack of an explicit ‘traditional women’s role’ within cattle production *per se* facilitated the entrance into male-coded property relations to cattle as they did not have to challenge any female-coded roles related to cattle. Possibly, ‘milkers’ and ‘farmers’ wives’ who had a solid place *within* the heart of the family’s cattle production faced a greater challenge taking up a *different* role than the one that was already constructed in relation to cattle. In this way, women relate to different ‘rules of the game’ from which they diverged in distinct ways (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998), where various characteristics of relations to both husbands and herds were more or less negotiable within the boundaries of what it meant to be a woman and a wife. Where certain aspects of cattle farming were intrinsic to the role of a wife, the gendered property relations that come with it might be harder to change without social repercussions which would also affect material welfare.

However, narratives of gender norms in relation to cattle were, as we saw above, expressed through ideas about responsibilities and rights of a wife across the three groups of women, and the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women cattle owners with control over cattle were mostly widows, divorced or had never married. Division of labour, responsibility, power and rights were based on the assumption of marriage. Accordingly, exceptions to these socio-symbolic associations between women and cattle were, as discussed earlier, often linked to an absence of marital union.

As Van Aelst and Holvoet (2016) highlight in their study of intersections of gender and marital status in climate change adaption strategies adopted by women in Tanzania, widows enjoyed benefits that other non-married women did not. However, in Ghanzi, young, never married women had the same kind of control over their cattle as widows – and men – were assumed to have. The assumption of women cattle owners being widows, discussed earlier in this chapter, thus needs to be revised.

Although gendered cattle relations determine to an important degree both male dominance in the cattle sector in Botswana as well as the role that women may assume in daily life, it is clear that ethnicity and marital status intersected with gender and relations to cattle to produce different positions for women relative to men, defining their possibilities, constraints and opportunities. While female-headed households often faced challenges related to limited assets, women in male-headed households have been shown to have less access to and control over assets found within the household (Van Aelst and Holvoet 2016). Among the Bakgalagadi with whom Solway conducted her fieldwork, sex roles became somewhat blurred when women reached middle age, and a number of different ways to increase higher status became available (Solway 1992). Further, Solway notes that a woman's status reaches a relative high point as a young unmarried adult before her autonomy is again constrained by marriage (ibid.: 51). Approaching middle age, Solway points out, the Mokgalagadi woman is usually head of her compound and thus enjoys increased status, more control over her crops, and participates more in public exchanges, including livestock exchanges – *particularly if widowed*. However, men's status also increases with age, and according to Solway, the only time a Bakgalagadi woman becomes head of the household is if she divorces, is widowed or never gets married. If even married women today openly have control over cattle, one might ponder what this means for the way we think about heads of households.

Van Aelst and Holvoet (2016) found in their study that such dynamics are highly dependent on what kind of relationship a woman has to her husband. Some women for example choose not to claim property rights in order to maintain marital harmony. Indeed, assumptions of complementarity, altruism and shared cooperation within a marriage have been critiqued (Englert 2008, Rao 2008, Van Aelst et Holvoet 2016). The ways in which these women's claims to cattle are enforceable thus differs according to what is seen as socially legitimate by the authority of the husband (Sikor and Lund 2009). In contrast to property relations to land, cattle are a reproducing resource, and a wife's claims to cattle need not diminish a husband's herd – in fact new cattle can strengthen the herd.

As such, arguments of social retribution tied to redistribution of property relations (Jackson 2003) might be less applicable to livestock, as someone's gaining of livestock does not necessarily mean another family member's loss, while issues of the male role of provider, and certain livestock species associated with the masculine are still relevant. As Rankin (2003) suggests, women conforming to a gendered worldview of women as dependent on



men, and not acting to enforce property claims, often do so as a strategy to avoid tensions or exclusions from social networks, of which the marriage union is a primary node.

Some married women, such as Chantelise and Hazel, choose to conform to gender norms in order not to disrupt family relations that were important to them, and which they relied on, whereas other women, such as Botshelo and Tjavanga, could challenge the norms without social retributions from their husbands or other family members. Strategies differ, and women in wealthy landed families might benefit in many ways from playing along with the patriarchal game as Jackson (2003) suggests, and so be less likely to challenge patriarchal structures. We saw how both Chantelise and Christine thought of themselves as exceptions that others might perceive negatively, although the term ‘wicked’ that Hodgson and McCurdy (2001) use might be too strong, and how being engaged in cattle activities inappropriate for women of their race and class became an arena for negotiating gender relations. However, all but one of the non-married (never married, divorced or widowed) women had control over their cattle, suggesting that a much broader marital status - not only widows - is a relevant intersecting category that influences property relations to cattle.

Further, cattle relations were crucial for the ways in which women negotiated the meaning of marital status. For the women above who felt limited by expectations of their ‘traditional’ role as women, it appeared that being married was one of the central reasons that determined their limitation. It was in relation to their husbands that their engagement in cattle production was limited – and it was through their husband’s engagement in cattle production that they could keep their material living standards, as I shall discuss further in chapter 7.

Moreover, the way that different women were able to draw on different ‘traditions’ of women’s relations to cattle while actually engaging with cattle in divergent ways, allowed women from the groups of ‘milkers’, ‘farmers’ wives’ and ‘distant’ from cattle distinct different avenues to gain a sense of pride, worth and personhood.

## Personhood derived from challenging expected ways to relate to cattle

In the narrative at the beginning of the chapter, we saw how women were given instrumental value in that their presence at the *kraal* was thought to encourage the male cattle farmer to stay and do a good job. However, one speaker also expressed his appreciation for the hostess’ achievement,

acknowledging its worth. Similar expressions of doing something that is valued in society emerged when I talked to women cattle farmers in Ghanzi. For some of the women, their cattle had brought self-confidence, a sense of worth, fulfilment and ‘personhood’ in a way that other livestock species did not. Such experiences could be linked to what are seen as culturally constituted projects that in Ortner’s (2006) terms infuse life with meaning and purpose. Throughout interviews and conversations with the forty women cattle owners, I collected statements about their cattle ownership and engagement in cattle production that indicated that they felt empowered, or had developed a sense of being a ‘full person’ (Rao 2008), although I did not ask about this directly. Twenty of the women cattle farmers interviewed mentioned things such as being proud and independent, respected, being a real person, being somebody, feeling big or doing something that not everyone could do. Further, the way such sense of personhood was accessed seemed to relate to the ways the distinct ideas of women as ‘milkers’, ‘farmers’ wives’ or those ‘distant’ from cattle were challenged. In this section, I tentatively explore how owning and controlling cattle, having knowledge about cattle and having experience of physical cattle work can be tied to personhood and self-confidence.

### **Owning and controlling cattle**

Of the nineteen women who expressed a sense of empowerment in a non-economic way, identifying a sense of worth or personhood in relation to their cattle, seventeen also had independent control over the cattle they owned, while two had control together with their husbands. None of the women without control over their cattle made such statements. These statements came from women in all three groups – from the ‘milkers’, the ‘farmers’ wives’ and those ‘distant from cattle’. They enjoyed the privileges that usually accompanied men’s cattle ownership such as respect, worth, trust, prestige and admiration. However, the kind of engagement that led to these reactions seemed to differ between groups, as I will explore below.

Leano said that on the very day she bought her cattle “I saw myself as a real person” (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill, translated), identifying the importance of being a cattle owner long before any of the potential material benefits have occurred. Kagiso’s explanation of the importance of cattle shed some light on this:

In Africa and in Botswana, if you don’t have cattle, you don’t feel that you are a respected member of society [...] To be a cattle rearer gives someone a dignity in society. (Interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso’s farm, Ghanzi Farms)

By owning cattle you become a real person, someone with dignity, and you feel respected, or to put it another way, having cattle is what many of these women perceive as ‘what counts’ in society.

Hilya, who shared control over her cattle with her husband, explained that when people saw that she was involved in cattle management they said, “you know what, this man has married a real woman!” (interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill, translated). A real woman, she explained, is a woman “who can do anything” (ibid.) and women who were not engaged in cattle work she identified as ‘lazy’. For her, practical cattle tasks were necessary in order to fulfil the role of a Herero wife, but engaging in what was beyond the ‘traditional’ role of a Herero wife brought her a sense of being a ‘real woman’.

Christine experienced that since the start, managing a cattle operation meant that her sense of worth was not dependent on appreciation from other people: “If you don’t like what I do, so be it [...] I do what I do and I do it well. If you don’t like it, so what?! [...]. I would say that I am now more confident” (interview 5 August 2013, Christine, Ghanzi town). Although Christine underlined that she did not care what others thought of her, many of the women I talked to in Ghanzi expressed a feeling of self-worth when talking about how others respected them for their engagement as managers of their cattle production.

When I asked Sarah from New Xanahas what it meant to her to have her own cattle she made it clear that it was tied to a sense of personhood: “I feel like a person” (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated), she said, and added “I am independent and not begging” (ibid.). In this way, property relations to cattle were not only an economic resource for her, but also important in becoming what Rao (2008) calls a ‘full person’. Thus in many cases, *de jure* ownership of cattle is not enough to benefit in terms of personhood, but men’s and women’s *relative* access (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b) to cattle – that women have the same kind of access as men do – is important for their negotiations of gender relations, and becoming a respected member of society. In a sense, the possibility of gaining personhood can be seen as a sign of social acceptance, and although it might not always be the case that women benefit from a resource in the same way as men (Jackson 2003) and as we have seen, women are able to gain status from property relations to cattle in a way that men have ‘traditionally’ done for a long time. Further, resources benefit different women in particular ways, and we shall see below how knowledge about cattle and a physical presence among cattle gives advantages to some women that it does not to others.

## Knowledge about cattle

Knowledge about cattle and cattle farming in general gave a sense of pride to the women cattle owners who framed themselves as coming from those traditions where women were ‘distant’ from cattle. “I am feeling very big now” (interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso’s farm, Ghanzi Farms), said Kagiso, referring to the fact that she learned how to manage her own cattle operation after her husband died. She got comments from others who:

See me growing into a farmer, a woman farmer [...].so I am feeling ok, I am getting experience, I am learning a lot other farmers. Gradually I am getting confident. [...] [They] would congratulate me [...] and respect me a lot. (Interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso’s farm, Ghanzi Farms)

Boineelo, a Motswana widow with a small herd of cattle on non-fenced land, said that she knew a lot about cattle farming, and it made her feel comfortable talking about cattle with others:

It is nice because when people discuss cattle, you have something to say because you know how to take care of [...] you know what the cattle need during the drought season. (Interview 19 June 2013, Ncojane, translated).

Thus, it was not only ownership itself, but also their knowledge about and competence in cattle work that promoted an increased sense of self-worth, while gaining them more respect and prestige, putting them on more equal terms with other cattle farmers around them.

When the women reproducing ethnicities placing women as ‘farmers’ wives’ mentioned cattle knowledge in ways suggesting that they derived worth or personhood from it, it was not in relation to supporting tasks such as administration or economic management, but in relation to everyday work with the cattle. For example, Magriet, an Afrikaner widow who we have already met, told me the story about when she went with her father to trek their cattle from Ghanzi to Lobatse in 1975. They had a few hundred cattle that they wished to sell to the BMC that was over six hundred kilometres south-east of Ghanzi. As this was before the building of the tarmac road, the cattle had to be herded ‘on the hoof’ the whole way. She was allowed to accompany them for part of the journey during the holidays, until it was time for her to go back to school. She talked about how she would ride a horse behind the cattle along with the others, and at night set up camp away from the trail. They would build ‘bush *kraals*’ out of camel thorn bushes to keep the cattle together during the night, and light fires to keep the lions away. Sitting on her veranda sipping white wine, Magriet remembered these adventures with fondness.

The herding tricks she learnt then came in handy last year when she was selling some sixty cattle to a nearby feedlot. Instead of renting expensive trucks, she and a few employees and friends herded the cattle on horseback for the fifty kilometres from her farm to the feedlot. She explained that “There were some untamed ones, around thirty, running around, and we had to chase after them. It was a mess [...] you always have a Brahman who is like...” (interview 22 July, Ina’s house, Ghanzi). With a sigh, she made a gesture to represent cattle running around and added that “in the beginning they just want to run away but after 10 kilometres they calm down” (ibid).

The hint of recognition in her story – “You always have a Brahman [...]” (interview 22 July, Magriet’s house, Ghanzi) came from knowledge of how cattle behave. Knowing how to take care of her own cattle operation made her feel good she said, as she was too shy to ask other people for help.

The ‘milkers’ interviewed made it clear that they knew about daily cattle care, although some of them had also hired cattle-hands to help out. However, such knowledge was seen as normal and expected for a Herero woman. Instead, knowledge about commercial cattle management was accompanied by a sense of self-confidence. “I want to manage my cattle in a good way” (interview 12 June, Saratjuira’s farm, north of Charleshill, translated), Saratjuira, a middle-aged Herero widow with a very large herd on non-fenced communal land said, “Me, it is only Simmental and Brahman, Hereford” (ibid.). As in Ramdas et al.’s (2001) example from India, women in Ghanzi gained confidence from acquiring livestock knowledge previously only associated with men. What kind of knowledge might have this effect, however, seemed to differ according to how women were imagined in relation to cattle in the socio-symbolic realm. Those women who judged traditional practical cattle knowledge to be something usual for women gained extra confidence from learning the ‘new’ knowledge that was a necessary aspect of being able to participate in the commercial beef export to the EU. Although actual practices are often unlike imagined ones (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998, Rao 2008), the way that specific women are able to benefit from a particular difference in terms of feelings of self-worth, confidence or increased personhood differs depending on (amongst other things) group membership.

Social acceptance of women’s property relations to a certain resource is crucial to their *de facto* ownership and their relative access as well as their ability to benefit from them (Rankin 2003, Agarwal 2003b). However, looking at how women drew a sense of pride, or self-worth in relation to cattle knowledge, it almost seemed as if the fact that it had not been fully socially accepted in the past, or at least not expected and associated with

women in the socio-symbolic realm, was what made it possible for these women to draw pride from cattle knowledge.

There were, however, challenges associated with acquisition of ‘new’ or ‘non-traditional’ cattle knowledge for some women. It might not be self-evident for women to move in those circles where men usually learn from each other about cattle production, and might possibly be intimidating to take part in conversations about cattle or ask for help when they do not know how to solve a problem. Kunouee and Tjavanga, the two Herero women we met earlier, agreed that their limited knowledge hampered their cattle management and sales profit. Tjavanga explained that:

We want experience from other women. If you work as a team you can succeed!” We have to know how to castrate – if there is a course we could go, we have to learn how to inject. We have to learn these things! (Interview 3 June 2013, Charleshill, translated)

It was thus not always easy for women to access the kind of knowledge associated with men or the commercial beef industry. Hilya, the Herero woman working in administration at the RAC house in Charleshill, who we also met previously, aimed to be in the same stud breeding business as Magriet and Miranda: “I want to be the woman who takes cattle and goats to the [Ghanzi Agricultural] Show, I want to do some courses” (interview 16 June, Charleshill). Accessing knowledge related to the commercial beef industry can thus present a challenge. Women with larger herds and fenced grazing lands on the Ghanzi farms did not lament a need for knowledge to the same extent, and their position as economic and social position meant they were able to be well-connected in the cattle sector, and thus potentially provided them with the information they needed. Further, the ones who took on supporting roles to their husbands could rely on the husbands’ knowledge. In this way, both class and marital status intersect with gendered knowledge structures. Moreover, practical knowledge that required a physical presence among cattle was also something that could generate prestige.

### **Physical presence among cattle makes a difference**

Among ‘farmers’ wives’ and women ‘distant’ from cattle, being physically present among the cattle themselves – either to supervise cattle-hands or to participate in the actual work – was seen as something very different from women’s usual and expected engagement in cattle farming, and was something that Christine, Annelies and Marie from the feedlot were all proud of.

For example, Botshelo told me that the women of today became educated and did not want to be at the cattle *kraal*. “It’s dusty, it will make them sneeze [...] But I am staying in the farm in the sun with the dust everywhere!” (interview 27 June, Botshelo’s farm, Charleshill). Botshelo was proud of being the one that spent time at the *kraal*, being someone that did not mind the dust and could spend her days among cattle. The physical presence and encounters with the cattle and their environment made a difference to her. Beyond being a cattle owner and beyond the economic benefits of having cattle, being a woman who ‘could take’ the dust and the hard work with the animals gave Botshelo a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of worth. Botshelo, Masego, the young Motswana woman from Njocane and Selina, an older Mokgalagadi separated woman with a small herd of cattle grazing on village grazing land in Charleshill, all spent time every day with their cattle, and saw their practical involvement as both an asset and something to be proud of.

Among the women framed as ‘distant’ from cattle, spending time at the *kraal* supervising cattle- hands was framed as something out of the ordinary and something to take pride in. For Botshelo, being among the cattle, supervising her staff in the dust, and helping out here and there, all served to create a ‘strong’ Mokgalagadi woman. By being on the farm and having basic knowledge about cattle production, she did something more than what was expected of her, according to the way she imagined the Bakgalagadi women. However, not all women wished to engage in hands-on practical cattle relations, and some simply preferred to pay someone else to do the hard work.

However, the ‘milkers’ expressed their experience differently. While visiting Rejoice, the married Herero woman, on her farm, we walked around the *kraal* as she checked on her cattle and made sure that the water trough was full. When I explained that I was interested in learning about cattle farming in the area, she chose to highlight the milking and tried to teach both my translator Thato and me how to milk. She had a good laugh at our initial inability to direct the milk into the bucket. Whereas men and women who did not identify themselves as Herero perceive the ‘Herero women’ as ‘strong women’ because of their milking skills. Saratjuira the old, married Herero woman with a very large herd north of Charleshill and Kavejamua, the Herero woman who together with her husband owned a small herd of cattle grazing on non-fenced land, described their material cattle relations as ‘just life’ and something that all women around them would do. The Herero ethnicity and femininity are co-created in relations to cattle so that for them *not* being engaged with cattle would be framed as negative. When talking

about milking, Hilya explained that it was women's work in 'her culture' and laughed that "Nowadays we are useless, we are using boys" (interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill, translated). Thus, although many women still did the milking, *not* milking was here constructed as a kind of failure. However, this does not mean that their work went unnoticed. Louisa, the married Herero woman with a very large herd of cattle on communal land, told me how proud her husband was of her staying alone at their farm looking after the cattle when he went to do errands in Windhoek, Namibia. However, unlike the 'farmers' wives' or those 'distant' from cattle, 'milkers' were reproducing an 'ordinary', or expected, Herero femininity when they were practically engaged with cattle.

The type of physical presence they had in the cattle operation and among the cattle themselves that would give women a sense of pride, confidence or self-worth also seemed to differ between the three groups identified here. In fact, some of the statements made implied that the women imagined as 'distant' from cattle were the ones with the greatest possibility to engage in cattle relations that could be framed as 'out of the ordinary' for women, and which could therefore be a source of confidence, sense of self-worth and personhood for them. In this sense, having access to a certain ethnicity and seeing that ethnicity as a property in a similar way to how Skeggs (2005) sees class culture as a property, can become an asset when challenging gendered assumptions linked to that property or ethnicity. Groups of people have been shown to benefit from property relations associated to certain cultures defined by ethnicity and racialisation, in the way in which, for example, groups of indigenous and Spanish land users did in Sundberg's (2008) study in Latin America, or Miskito and Garifuna land users did in Honduras, where Mollet's (2006) study was conducted. The women in Ghanzi, however, seemed to gain a sense of personhood, self-worth and confidence when challenging ideas around 'normal' relations to cattle in different ways. In this sense, perhaps ethnicity can be seen as an asset when negotiating personhood in relation to cattle. Although one should be careful when assuming that male-coded practices would offer women similar benefits (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b) or a sense of personhood (Jacksson 2003) this seemed to be the case with cattle-related activities in Ghanzi. The ability to benefit from resources through access to social identity, as Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, can then be extended to the possibility of personhood.

In this way, it was cattle specifically that presented the possibilities of an increased sense of self-worth, confidence and of becoming a 'full person'. Yet again, those women for whom it was not part of their socio-symbolic



association with cattle, in contrast to the Herero ‘milkers’, seem to be able, to a larger extent, to draw self-worth and personhood from their physical presence among cattle and their ‘hands-on’ cattle practices. It might thus be in the twilight between social acceptance and expected engagements that the greatest possibilities for benefitting in terms of prestige lie. Although I explore the relation between cattle and personhood in a tentative way, these women’s accounts show the potential value of investigating the meaning of different kinds of engagement with a certain species at various intersections of social categories when assessing the potential benefits of women’s livestock ownership.

## Conclusions

As the narrative at the beginning of this chapter shows, women cattle farmers are becoming more visible, while at the same time longstanding gender structures are being upheld by reproducing ‘traditional’ associations of women in relation to cattle. Although men dominate the cattle sector in Botswana, we have seen that there are cracks in this ‘citadel of male power’. As we saw in an earlier chapter, there have been many discussions in the literature concerning men’s dominance in cattle production in Botswana and elsewhere, where the focus often portrays a male exclusiveness in cattle production, while women play at best a supporting role (Kinsman 1983, Comaroff and Comaroff 1990, Solway 1992, Mazonde 1994, Curry 1996, Darkoh and Mbaiwa 2002, Adams, Kalabamu et al. 2003, Kalabamu 2006, Sigwele 2007, Flintan 2008, Malope and Batisani 2008, Flintan 2010, Gulbrandsen 2012, Hovorka 2012). However, there is a discrepancy between the widely held conviction that ‘women do not have cattle in Botswana’, and what is actually happening on the *sand veld* of Ghanzi.

The women in Ghanzi District who own, manage and work with cattle do so in various ways and are engaged in cattle production to a greater and broader extent than what is often acknowledged by scholars, statisticians, decision makers and certain groups of farmers. Thus, women’s active and independent involvement in cattle production needs to be taken seriously. If this is accepted, then we might have to acknowledge that those women who are engaged in cattle production are more than simply exceptions, even while recognising that women cattle farmers are still in the minority.

Although the larger structure of Botswana society dominated by Batswana culture might place women as distant from cattle and instead associated with chickens in the socio-symbolic realm, as Hovorka (2012) points out, I have shown through an intersectional approach how other

aspects of women-cattle relations transpire both in terms of socio-symbolic associations and in practice. Socio-symbolic ways of associating women with certain cattle practices through discursive claims to ‘cultural traditions’ positions women differently in relation to the same kind of involvement in cattle production.

Such ‘cultural traditions’ intersect with class so that, for example, whereas Herero women are generally pictured as ‘milkers’ performing manual work with cattle, higher class Herero women employ men to do the cattle work. In this way, they distance themselves from the cattle physically in comparison with their socio-symbolic associations, to engage in practices more similar to how Afrikaner and English ‘farmers’ wives’ are pictured, or the way that the interviewed Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women envisaged as ‘distant’ from cattle across class lines operated in practice. Nightingale (2006) shows how gender relations are shaping how a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ are defined and made to appear natural in different environmental contexts, and I show how this is done in relation to cattle in particular in Ghanzi. Gender is thus *done* in social settings, as West and Zimmerman (1987) argue, but more specifically through relations to cattle.

Whereas Peluso (2009) shows how ethnicity is done through various practices of land use in Indonesia, and Mollet and Faria (2013) demonstrate how racism and patriarchy are mutually constructed in shaping human-nature relations, I draw these together to show how gender, ethnicity, race and class merge together with marital status to create different points of departure for women from which they negotiate their social relations and control over cattle. In this way gender dynamics, including marital status, intersecting with ethnicity, class and race shape the kinds of relations to cattle that are possible, appropriate, accepted and valued. I have shown how ideas about the interests, needs and access patterns to both grazing land and cattle of different groups of people are produced, reproduced, but also challenged. Relations to cattle constitute, in this way, a relation of power between people in a different way than relations to other livestock do.

While Rao (2008) shows that women’s ownership of land can give them a sense of being a ‘full person’, I have discussed how the kind of engagement with cattle that women with different socio-symbolic associations with cattle actually have, make a difference to how they gain a sense of self-worth, pride or personhood. As Kandiyoti (1988, 1998) demonstrates, women relate to various ‘rules of the game’ in different settings of gendered structures, and also act in divergence from them. By exploring the distinct ways that women at different intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class challenge the specific expectations of them in relation to cattle, I have pointed towards

ways that they might gain a sense of self-worth, confidence and personhood from varying engagement in cattle production.

In this way, I have begun to explore how women not only gain a sense of being ‘full persons’ from owning and controlling a culturally valuable resource, as Rao (2008) has shown, but how different women access such personhood from different cattle connections depending on the specific communities of practice (Birke and Brandt 2009) to which they relate. Skeggs (2005) has shown how class culture can be seen as a kind of property invested differently in people, where some people have access to entitlements in the form of shared understandings of the world. In a sense, one might consider socio-symbolic placements in relation to cattle as entitlements that women can make use of when negotiating property relations to cattle. Moreover, I have shown how such discursive entitlements can be an asset in the opposite way, as challenging expected relations to cattle can lead to a sense of pride, self-worth, confidence and personhood.

In the following chapter, I show in what ways women with and without control over cattle benefit from their cattle ownership beyond a sense of personhood. Further, I explore whether women’s divergence from ‘traditional’ relations to cattle is a matter of increased visibility or whether it is a sign of change, and investigate how this has been possible.



## 7 Commercialisation and women's claims to cattle

### Introduction

While governments tend to focus on formalising property rights, researchers have shown how there are still structural constraints to women's ownership and access to resources (Arora-Jonsson 2014). I explore in this chapter how women are negotiating such structures and take action within their constraints in their efforts to engage in cattle production in what are seen as new ways. I examine how the commercialisation of cattle that has been stimulated by the EU beef export market presents both opportunities and challenges for cattle farmers and how, together with governmental efforts to support gender equality, it has affected women's motivation and their possibilities to engage in cattle farming. I further show how these benefits, in terms of both material welfare and social positions, are linked to cattle as a livestock species, partly related to the commercial beef industry, and cannot necessarily be replaced by the ownership of other livestock species.

After a narrative portraying how a young Mokgalagadi woman was engaged in cattle production, I discuss in the first section how women benefit from cattle ownership in terms of monetary income, subsistence products, being credit-worthy for loans and how cattle can be an investment for the future. I reflect on what makes it possible and desirable for certain women to gain control over cattle (Agarwal 1994b) in this setting not for others, showing that while some women choose strategically not to engage in independent cattle production, it may still be possible for them to benefit from it (cf. Kandiyoti 1988, 1998, Jackson 2003, Rao 2008).

In the second section, I explore how a focus on the commercial sale of cattle to the export beef market has affected women's property relations to cattle in Ghanzi. Although research has underscored how women tend to lose control over and access to livestock and livestock assets when the production is commercialised (Talle 1988, Curry 1996, Hodgson 1999b, Kristjanson, et al. 2010, Sanginga 2013, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b), I examine in what way the commercial aspects of the beef industry have affected different women cattle owners' access to cattle and cattle assets in Ghanzi in various ways.

Further, I bring up the role of government grants and loans as well as official efforts to stimulate and support gender equality in influencing women's abilities to achieve control over cattle. I discuss how culturally established and valued projects (Ortner 2001, 2006) are gendered and how perceptions of women's increased engagement in cattle production defined by changing property relations are creating new imaginable possibilities for women might indicate that the ways in which such projects are gendered might be changing. I explore how drawing on stories of how it used to be 'in the past' (Rose 1994, Fortmann 1995, Cornwall 2001) allows women of today to frame themselves as independent women, while discursively reproducing the very traditions that they challenge. This section also draws together discussions from previous chapters and situates the findings in relation to previous research.

Concluding the chapter is a section where I reflect on how women are able to benefit from their cattle ownership in different ways in the wake of commercialisation of cattle production. I ponder how not only material conditions related to class offer various challenges and opportunities for different women, but also how the ways in which different women are associated with cattle, or not, in the socio-symbolic realm allows them to draw on different actual relations to cattle for social status.

### **Narrative: Realeboga's kraal**

*The first time I met Realeboga, she was in Charleshill village to pick up a few pieces at the hardware store in order to fix her broken borehole pump. As I was sitting in the Rural Administration Centre building talking to Raymond, the animal production officer, a young Mokgalagadi woman of twenty-two years old, in a bright pink jacket walked in. Raymond introduced her as a woman cattle owner and we started chatting. Realeboga made a point out of telling me that the cattle operation was under her control and that she took care of everything herself, save for the*

*daily task of looking after the cattle at the kraal, for which she had hired a cattle hand. She invited me to go with her and visit her kraal, and later that day I gave her a lift back home to Ncojane.*

*We sat down on plastic chairs outside one of the mud houses of her family's compound. When I asked her about her cattle she told me that she had bought them last year in October. She had finished school and applied for the YDF and received 98,000 pula. She bought cattle from her aunt and her father, accompanied by a YDF officer who was able to advise her. To apply for a YDF grant, it was necessary to have access to land and water, and so her father had accepted that she could use his. This year, because of drought, she had moved the cattle to a fenced leasehold farm which she rented from a relative. She said that she wanted her business to grow big so that after three years she could pay back the half of the grant that was in fact a loan. Then she would apply for a CEDA loan to start a tourist business. She would still keep the cattle business, she assured me, and run both at the same time. The cattle she bought from her father were of mixed exotic breeds, and she had bought a Brahman bull to breed in more Brahman genes into the herd so that she would gain drought resistant animals with heavy calves. She had planned to sell her cattle for the first time in February, to either BMC or to Feedmasters. She had lost four calves to leopards already, but was confident that her herd would grow because she had bought pregnant heifers, even though they were slightly more expensive.*

*When she grew up, her father had cattle and her mother had goats, as they still did. The cattle were still grazing on non-fenced communal grazing land and they sold to the BMC occasionally. When they were younger, people collected cattle to keep, Realeboga explained to me, but "nowadays cattle lose value. Nowadays you are rich in the bank" (field notes 19 June 2013, outside Ncojane). She said that the gendered division of labour of the daily cattle work is similar to how it has always been, but there are more women buying their own cattle now because of the availability of grants and loans such as YDF and CEDA.*

*When I came back a few days later to visit Realeboga's cattle at her kraal, we drove an hour from Ncojane on a corrugated gravel road to get there. Inside a big circle of thorn bushes with an opening at one end, the trees were decorated with branding equipment, blankets and buckets and there were a few chairs scattered in between. Realeboga's father, who stayed there full time, greeted us, and one by one, three men on horseback came to settle in for the night. The kraal was nearby, and we went to have a look. Realeboga showed us her own branding iron with a proud smile.*

*When I asked Realeboga if women also ride horses, she jumped up on one of the horses and went for a gallop, manoeuvring calmly through the thorny vegetation. Then we all sat down to have some freshly made sour milk with brown sugar and chatted about cattle. “Some women ask me why I have cattle as a woman, but”, Realeboga said, “I feel that people respect me now that I have cattle [...] when you don’t have cattle you are nothing” (field notes 19 June 2013, outside Ncojane). She underlined that she did not want to be dependent on a man and that as a woman today, “you have to stand up and do something.” \**

This story illustrates a new way in which women keep cattle in Ghanzi today, and in what ways they can benefit from cattle ownership. Today, young, single Bakgalagadi and Batswana women apply for loans and grants to venture independently into cattle production, hiring male labour.

## **Benefits and challenges of cattle ownership**

Once women do own cattle, the ways in which they are able to, and actually choose to, benefit from their cattle ownership varies, as do the associated challenges they may meet.

### **Money from cattle sales and subsistence use of cattle**

In talking about ways to benefit from cattle, all of the women cattle owners I interviewed mentioned in some way the possibility to sell them and get money. Selling cattle, and especially young, castrated, male cattle, or *tollies*, gave an income that far exceeds that of selling goats or other small stock. However, it was also more expensive to keep cattle and more work to keep up with EU regulations, but once cattle were owned, and if they multiplied, they provided economic security as well as the possibility for material welfare that goats and other livestock could not match, at least according to the women I interviewed.

For the women cattle owners I interviewed, money from cattle sales was a means to increase material welfare in the form of better houses, clothes and other goods such as cameras. Selina, the Mokgalagadi woman who owned cattle grazing in Charleshill village area who we met in chapter 6, explained to me that the local saying “a cow is a diamond” (interview 10 June 2013, Charleshill village, translated) meant that a cow gave you everything – food, cash, leather and security. Magriet, the Afrikaner widow who we also met in chapter 6, rented a freehold farm from a Motswana man and went to visit her cattle every Friday in order to check on them and to



feed them supplements. Her income from cattle sales was the most important contribution to her economic situation. Having cattle means “security”, she said, as she “cannot survive” on the salary from the primary school where she worked as a teacher (interview 22 July 2013, Magriet’s house, Ghanzi). She was used to a high level of material welfare, and she also supported to a certain extent one of her daughters who was at university. As a widow, she could rely only on her own activities to sustain herself, and she could not do it without her cattle.

Omponye, an older Motswana woman who lived in Ncojane and who had her large herd on communal land, explained that women sell cattle so that they could afford houses and electricity. “In the past you could just use rafters, grass and dung to make a perfect house, but now things have changed. Now people want the cemented houses and the electricity” (interview 17 June 2013, Ncojane, translated). Omponye defined herself as part of a change towards what she calls ‘modernity’, which made it necessary to have money in order to enjoy new standards of material welfare. Kande, the married Herero woman who worked as a cleaner at the RAC and whom we have already met, linked her interest in cattle to ideas about development as well as to contemporary pressures regarding consumption.

When we were small my parents did not have suitcases or wardrobes [...] but because we are civilised now and we think we are developed, we know we have to buy a wardrobe. So that’s why we have to sell our cows, to buy these things. (Interview 13 November 2013, Charleshill, translated).

Kande had around ten head of cattle of her own, but used her husband’s brand, and in the end it was he who decided when to sell and how to spend the money. Cattle were a way for her and her family to follow changing trends as well as to increase their material living standard in some ways. Sarah in New Xanahas underlined how cattle could increase her material welfare when she explained why she had chosen cattle instead of goats or chickens when she was offered support from the government:

I know that when I have cattle like this, especially female cattle, they will multiply and I will be able to sell them and get enough money to buy things [...] we did not used to have those fancy clothes, we have to buy clothes for children, but we used to use only an apron to cover up. Now you have to buy lots of things. (Interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated)

Omponye, Kande and Sarah all emphasised how cattle were the best choice of livestock if one was to be able to afford a 'modern' material lifestyle.

Leano, the Mokgalagadi woman with a very small herd on her boyfriend's fenced farm in Charleshill sub-district, did not have her own brand when I interviewed her, and had not yet sold any cattle as her heifers had not yet given birth, but she firmly believed that she would do so in the future. Leano emphasises the difference between farming cattle and farming goats: "cattle can live during drought [...] and when you sell cattle you get better money [...] unlike after selling goats - when you sell a goat you can only get maize meal" (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill market, translated). It was thus specifically cattle, and not any other form of livestock, that would generate large sums of money when sold.

In the Ghanzi countryside, it should be noted, there were limited possibilities to start up businesses as the population was scattered and because their accumulated purchasing power was not always enough to support businesses supplying non-vital goods. Thus, the demand for cattle created by the beef industry had provided business opportunities. While crop farming was normally difficult in the semi-arid climate, it had become an increasing challenge since 2010 because of the drought. Selina lamented the lack of rainfall as she was no longer able to rely on her crops. Further, she tells me how in the past they could easily trade small stock such as goats with store owners or sell them at the market to get money. She and her son-in-law agreed that today goats did not sell for much, so that now she had to sell cattle which before, she pointed out, were sold only for special purposes such as the children's school fees.

For Botshelo, the married Mokgalagadi woman with a large herd of cattle grazing with her husband's cattle on a leasehold fenced farm in Charleshill sub-district, independence was tied to the availability of money that she could decide over herself, and this money was made from cattle farming. Botshelo's control over her own cattle and her autonomous decision making over the herd meant that she could benefit from the income generated from the cattle to gain economic independence and control over her material welfare. Her view was typical of the Bakgalagadi women I talked to about the advantages of controlling their own cattle. Leano explained that the women around her were "trying to improve their way of life; if they don't do so, they will remain behind in life." (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill market, translated), which was why she had decided to buy a couple of heifers. These women concluded that cattle farming was the way to increase their living standards through monetary

income. For these women, their involvement in cattle farming meant that they created the possibility of independent economic security, both in the present and in the future. They chose cattle because it was the only livestock species capable of supplying them with enough money when sold, and that would also provide them with milk, as well as sufficient economic credibility to qualify to obtain future loans in order to attain future goals.

With monetary income being such a crucial benefit from cattle, it became clear that access to the market was of the utmost importance to women cattle owners in Ghanzi. The possibilities of selling cattle were, however, accompanied by challenges shaped by EU beef export regulations and access to the market differed between the women cattle owners I interviewed. For example, such challenges related to EU regulations as implemented by the BMC and the DVS put pressure on cattle farmers to follow traceability regulations. Omponye complained that having cattle on non-fenced land posed restrictions on sales: “The EU wants us to fence the areas where the animals graze [...] the EU wants only cattle from the fenced areas” (interview 17 June 2013, Ncojane, translated). For Omponye, fences were gatekeepers into the export production that she and other women in Ghanzi wished to be a part of.

Similarly, Rejoice, the middle-aged Herero widow with a medium-sized herd grazing on non-fenced communal grazing land, pointed out the challenges to accessing the market for farmers with cattle on non-fenced grazing land. Her daughter explained to me that the buyers at the market wish to buy young cattle but would not buy cattle without boluses, which their young cattle did not have. When I later asked Rejoice about the situation, she told me that when the extension officers from the DVS in Ghanzi come to insert boluses in the animals,

They would set a date and by that date when it comes, the borehole would die, and when the borehole is dead the cattle don't come to drink [...] they would miss that chance to get the bolus. (Interview 15 June 2013, Makunda, translated)

Rejoice also explained that the DVS officers only came once a year, and thus they would miss their opportunity to sell their cattle at a prime age. Access to fences through private property rights to grazing land was thus an important component in accessing the commercial cattle market. Further, farmers with larger herds were able to sell cattle without significantly influencing herd productivity negatively. Class, in terms of land tenure and herd size was thus an important aspect of market access.

It became clear to what extent inequalities of access, in relation to the EU regulations governing beef exports that were outlined in chapter 4, impacted on the possibilities for women cattle owners at different intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class (social identities in Ribot and Peluso's (2003) terms) to benefit from their animals in terms of monetary income and material welfare. Access to cattle-hands (labour), grazing land and herds large enough to allow the removal of some individuals without disturbing herd growth (capital), as well as fences and breeding technology (technology), coupled to knowledge about the commercial beef exports to the EU (knowledge) were all factors that shaped access to the market and influenced owners' ability to benefit in terms of material welfare. In a later section, I discuss how women with control over their cattle (access to authority) and those that have no control, or share control with their husbands (access via negotiations of other social relationships), might benefit differently.

Price incentives to produce cattle that were heavy at the age of weaning, encouraged farmers, not only to use exotic breeds, but also to buy supplementary food for them. Furthermore, modern borehole pump technology requires diesel. "Now we vaccinate them for foot and mouth disease [...] and buy food for them and also buy diesel" (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated) explained Sarah, and Bao clarified that:

We need to buy supplementary feed for the cattle. When they go around they can't find enough, so when they come back to the *kraal* they should at least have something to lick. (Interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated)

She also explained that:

In the old days [...] you'd sell cattle and because the price of things were low at that time you could get things at a good price and enough of your money would stay behind with you, you could put away for the future. Unlike now, you buy something the money is gone, you need money again to buy because things are expensive. (ibid.)

With new cattle practices that require cash for buying necessary products, the need for selling cattle increases.

What Bao pointed out was that it was difficult to rear cattle today in an accepted manner without spending money – and the only way to get money was to sell cattle, and so the process continued. Heading a cattle operation involved expenditure no matter how much money the cattle actually

brought in; a challenge with different implications for women with different sized herds and property rights to grazing land. Class based on wealth and access to capital thus became important for market access and for the ability to benefit from cattle assets (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

Thus, both the willingness to sell cattle, the use of technology and larger herd sizes normally associated with 'commercial' cattle operations were today to be found among 'communal' farmers as well. This informs us that we cannot assume that farmers on non-fenced grazing land are less willing to sell their cattle. This is also reflected in Mosalagae and Mogotsi's (2013) conclusion that poor access to markets is among the obstacles for those 'pastoralists' in rural Botswana who wished to practise commercial farming. The difference was that breeding and grazing management was more difficult to control on non-fenced land.

However, although the monetary income from cattle sales was highlighted by all women, subsistence use of cattle was also significant for them across ethnicity, race and class. As we saw in chapter 5, subsistence use of milk and meat was prevalent on the larger Afrikaner- and English-owned freehold farms, although not always used by the women cattle owners themselves. Nharo women, as well as Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero women with both larger and smaller herds on both fenced and non-fenced grazing land, highlighted milk from cattle as an important cattle asset. The amount of milk from a cow is considerably higher than from goats, and although goat milk is also used as a subsistence resource, a single milking cow can make a significant contribution to a family's daily food requirements. Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Herero women with different sized herds and varying land tenure also underscored the importance of their value as food and gifts at ceremonies such as funerals and weddings. Gendrede pointed out that having control over her own cattle allowed her to participate in ceremonies in her own right:

When you can make your own decisions, life becomes easy for you. Also during funerals, during weddings you can slaughter a cow and use because they are your own. (Interview 6 June 2013, north of Charlehill, translated)

Goats were used for food at ceremonies at times, but were not as highly valued. Money could replace cattle in social exchanges today, I was told, but for those living under poorer material living conditions, access to sufficient money from sources other than cattle sales was limited.

Women thus benefitted from cattle in terms of material welfare both through subsistence use and through money from cattle sales in ways that they would not from other livestock. Further, with the possibility to

contribute independently with a cow at ceremonies, networks and social relations can be strengthened. In this way, cattle benefits are then not only accessed through authority, social identity or negotiations of social relations, as Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, but they also help to negotiate social relations, social status and authority, as we shall see in the sections below.

### **Cattle as an investment for a better life in the future**

Recurring comments from the women I talked to on the advantages connected with cattle ownership also touched upon investments for the future. Kandee emphasised the long-term benefits of cattle: “It is not like having money which you just use and it is finished – a cow you can keep and it multiplies and you can use it in the future” (interview 13 November 2013, Charleshill, translated). Leano identified both the potential to sell cattle for cash and the long-term benefits as her motivation for deciding to buy her heifers. It was an opportunity for her to get ahead in life and to create a back-up for future problems. She told me that the best thing about having cattle was that “when you have cows, you have a future – if you are faced with a difficulty you can sell cattle and solve that problem” (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill market, translated). Leano sold dried fish for a living, but decided that buying cattle was the way for her to gain economic security in the long term.

Among the women living under poorer conditions, selling their cattle was a means to put their children or themselves through school. Pena, a young, married Herero-speaking woman who owned cattle together with her husband, remembered that when she was in secondary school her father sold some cattle that he had put aside for her in order to pay her school fees. Goitse was a single Mokgalagadi woman in her early twenties who had built up a herd outside Charleshill large enough to pay for her own university education. She had her own brand, and her own plot of fenced land that she was allocated from the land board. As a child, she was gifted four heifers by her parents which multiplied to give her ten. When she became older, she decided to invest more seriously in cattle farming, and applied for a loan through the Youth Development Fund (YDF). The herd that she was able to buy with that money grew, and when she sold some to pay back the YDF loan, she was able to obtain a loan from the National Development Bank. That loan allowed her to invest even more in her herd, and now she had over a hundred head of white Brahman cattle.

Although she had hired a man to take care of the daily cattle work, she made the decisions about what and when to sell. It was consequently

through Goitse's active and independent involvement in cattle production that she was able to go to University, where she was learning more about agriculture. For Boineelo, it was in her children's future that she invested the money from her cattle. She explained that although she was not working, her cattle enabled her to "lead [...] a good life because my children are not being sent home because of not paying school fees. My children don't go to school on foot, I manage to hire transport for them to take to school" (interview 19 June 2013, Ncojane, translated). Her cattle thus provided her and her children with higher material welfare and also offered an educated future.

Further, Magriet told me that her cattle serve as a retirement fund, as "I can't teach until I die" (interview 22 July 2013, Magriet's house, Ghanzi). Even though Magriet was relatively wealthy and had a job as a school teacher, she still relied on her cattle operation for maintaining her high material living standard. Having cattle was thus an investment in the future, both in terms of education and economic security, both of which were foundations for social positions. In this way, access to monetary benefits from cattle was not only dependent on access to capital, technology and the market, as Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, but cattle are also capital themselves, and even create capital through herd growth.

However, a major challenge for the future of all cattle farmers in Ghanzi was the uncertainty of rainfall. Drought is a constant threat to herd growth, reproduction and even survival. Cattle investments for the future thus run the risk of vanishing. In addition, small herds are the worst hit by drought as larger herds have a better chance that enough cattle will survive for continued growth once the rain comes (Behnke 1987). Further, access to private grazing land and fences facilitated grazing management in times of drought and again reinforced class dynamics. As such, drought and even gender became issues of class, as women at large tend to own smaller herds, according to national statistics (GoB 2014).

Cattle also function to ensure economic credit-worthiness by functioning as collateral in Ghanzi. Borrowing money was difficult if others doubted one's ability to pay back, and owning cattle was seen as an assurance of one's capability to do so, as one could always sell a cow. Nharo-speaking Sarah from New Xanahas also related this to gendered income possibilities, and whereas,

A woman will only get money when she works, otherwise she won't get money" a man "can go and borrow money knowing that he will do something to get money [to return it], he can make a piece job, or do

something, he can make all sorts of plans to make money. (Interview New Xanahas, 6 December, translated)

In other words, having cattle that one could sell can functioned as security and credit-worthiness for women that might otherwise not be trusted to be able to pay back a loan. This in turn can allowed for some economic room to manoeuvre. Before she had cattle, Sarah explained, she was, “dependent on my relatives for money and now when I have the cattle I am independent and don’t rely on them” (ibid.). Although she had not yet sold any cattle, she and her children frequently drank the milk and needed less money for food. A sense of economic independence and security thus came with the cattle. Selina, the older, separated Mokgalagadi woman with a small herd of cattle grazing on village grazing land in Charleshill whom we met previously, similarly highlighted the link between cattle and cash loans: “[...] if you want to loan [money] from somebody they will give you a loan because they know you have cattle” (interview 10 June 2013, Charleshill village, translated). Cattle were therefore an economic resource even without the need to sell a single animal. The trust that cattle stimulated in potential money-lenders was specific to cattle as a species, and was not engendered by the ownership of other farm animals. Small livestock, such as goats or sheep, were not considered to be sufficiently valuable to act as security, and the market for these animals was not as well developed as the cattle market in Ghanzi. In this way, cattle ownership and control can allowed women to strengthen their social positions as they were seen as trustworthy recipients of cash loans, and were able to benefit materially through access to that cash. In this sense, women with control over their cattle access benefitted from their cattle through the negotiations of social relationships with people who could lend them money. However, not only did they access benefits through negotiations of social relations as Ribot and Peluso (2003) suggest, but those negotiations were also dependent on the very cattle from which they benefit.

As we have seen throughout this section from the way that women cattle owners in Ghanzi talked about cattle, it is clear that they benefited from cattle in terms of their material welfare and social positions that the ownership of other livestock could not provide. Kenosi, a middle-aged Mokgalagadi widow with a small herd of cattle on non-fenced, communal land, emphasised that she had bought cattle in the year 2000, “because I realised that if I chose another life without cattle I would not lead a good life” (interview 19 June 2013, translated). Not only were women dependent on access to technology, capital, markets, labour, knowledge and authority



sometimes shaped by social identity and negotiations of other social relationships, as Ribot and Peluso (2003) emphasise, but cattle were also integral in shaping social identity, social relationships, authority and capital. Cattle production was the sub-sector on which agricultural development efforts have been centred, as we saw in chapter 4, in a way that pools social, political and economic value in the same livestock species. In this sense, longstanding values intermingle with commercial values, as Rankin (2003) points out, in that cattle both shape social relations and are accessed through them.

However, cattle were more expensive to keep than smaller livestock such as goats, sheep or chickens, especially with the demands of the export beef industry, and limited access to grazing land, water and money to feed back into the operation has major implications for its success. Although women at different intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class do manage to enter the cattle sector, many do not. How women who do not own cattle experienced these challenges is beyond the scope of this study, although finding out if cattle-less women would in fact want to have their own cattle and why would be a pertinent topic for future research.

#### **Marital status and benefits from cattle ownership for women**

The women I interviewed who were farming together with their husbands all benefited in terms of material welfare from cattle assets in some way, even if they did not have control over the cattle themselves. For example, Hilya and Wendy, whom we have met several times, enjoyed a high material living standard based on income from cattle. With class connected to herd size and land tenure (Bolt and Hillbom 2013a) as well as being constructed through association with membership of different social strata (Ortner 2006), women could in fact indirectly benefit also in terms of social position from cattle ownership even if they had shared control or even had no control over their cattle. These women could benefit from their position as the wife in patriarchal family relationships, as Jackson (2003) suggests, and women of wealthier families would have potentially more to gain, drawing status and material welfare from their husbands' herd control. Jackson also noted that the women who benefit most from an established patriarchal system are those who are least likely to challenge that system. Women who do actually challenge established gender practices run the risk, as Hodgson and McCurdy (2001) note, of being perceived negatively, or even as being 'wicked', either by their husband, family or community. The role of marriage for women's social identities is in this sense important for the way that changes in gender

relations affect women's access to resources (Håkansson 1994). However, there are also examples of wealthier women, such as Christine and Botshelo, who were independent and had control over their cattle, as well as wealthier women such as Annelies, who started her own cattle operation without her husband's involvement. Thus, this showed the importance of other mediating factors such as the nature of the individual dynamics of the marriage relationship (cf. Van Aelst and Holvoet 2016). Further, their acquisition of cattle did not necessarily affect men's herds in a negative way, just as women's independent control over cattle potentially escaped conflictive issues related to limited resources such as land, which suggests that any restraints linked to trying to keep peace and tranquillity in the home as discussed by Jackson (2003) might be likely to emerge from other concerns.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Gendrede and Rejoice thought that the possibility of widows owning their own cattle was something new. For them, owning and controlling cattle independently was a challenge. Gendrede did not see having a cattle operation on her own as something positive, and said that she would prefer to share the 'burden' with someone else. Although it was clear that control over cattle had benefits, it could be a challenge for an older woman to manage and take care of a herd herself. Similarly, Elisabeth, the English/Nharo woman selling cattle at the beginning of chapter 5, now felt that she was stuck with her cattle operation. Although she had made an active choice to start it by herself many years ago, she was now looking for a way out.

Gendrede, on the other hand, who gained sole ownership of the herd when her husband died, never felt she had the option to do anything else. While control over cattle might have put them both in a privileged position in terms of independence and economic advantage, both of them perceived it as a burden. For Gendrede, alternative options were so far away for her that even imaginable possibilities were limited. However, as we recall, she refrained from giving the cattle to her sons because she was convinced that the 'lack of love' in the world today would lead them to quarrel. Hence, whereas other women, both in Ghanzi (recalling for example the stories of Chantelise and Danielle in chapter 6) and in discussions on married women's property relations elsewhere (Jackson 2003, Agarwal 2003b, Kandiyoti 1998) refrain from independent property rights to cattle (or land in other literature) in order not to disrupt family relations, Gendrede refrained from giving up her cattle for the same reason.

On the other hand, Sarah explained how some of her married friends complain that when their husband sold a cow, he used all the money for

himself, so “it is better to have my own cattle because I can see how other women suffer” (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated). Sarah explained that she preferred having her own cattle without the involvement of a man: “Some women say that even if the men are with their wives, when the husband sells a cow he eats the money on his own” (ibid.). With control over the cattle “men have the power” (ibid.), she clarified, and laughingly added that she would not share her cattle with her husband when she got married. She saw her expected role as a wife as being subordinate to that of a husband, but made it clear that she intended to challenge that idea in practice, as having one’s own cattle introduced new possibilities for independence. As Sarah suggested, keeping control over her cattle even after marriage would allow her to negotiate gender relations in relation to her expected role as a wife. To Sarah, controlling her own cattle was crucial for reaping both material and non-material benefits of cattle ownership, in line with Agarwal’s (1994a, 1994b) argument concerning land in South Asia.

Bao, Sarah and C’goise had all chosen to have their own brands and to have control over their own cattle in order to increase their material welfare. In addition, it was clear that the economic security they obtained from their individual ownership allowed them to influence their own material welfare and the opportunity to achieve independence from relatives or husbands.

Among the women in Ghanzi, those who did not have control over their cattle also saw fewer opportunities for economic independence and influence over their material welfare. On the other hand, those women who engaged in management decisions and sales independently, married or not, expressed a sense of control over their cattle, their economic security and their possibilities for deciding how to increase their material welfare. Controlling cattle made a difference, and controlling other small stock such as goats could not provide them with the same opportunities. However, the extent to which it was desirable and possible to strive for such independent control varied, as we have seen, and while I do not wish to generalise between groups, it is clear that we need to take into account the individual situations of women in order to understand their challenges, potential benefits and choices.

### **Gaining control over cattle in the wake of commercialisation?**

Statistics show an increase of cattle operations headed by women, as we saw in chapter 5. However, we cannot know how many women like Realeboga (from the introductory narrative) there have been throughout

history who have actively strived to acquire cattle and to have control over them, but as was discussed the previous chapter, they have certainly not been visible. In contrast to the Bakgalagadi women in Solway's (1988) study in the 1980s, who kept cattle in secret to retain some independence even after marrying, many of the women I met in Ghanzi who owned and controlled cattle were openly proud of their independence and cattle skills. Further, both the men and women I met around Ghanzi District, and not least around Charleshill sub-district, talked frequently and openly about women cattle farmers in positive terms. Thirty out of the forty female cattle owners I interviewed thought that there were more women involved in cattle farming today than a generation ago. This judgement referred mostly to women engaged independently and with control over their own cattle. In other words, non-widowed women's control over cattle was perceived as a recent phenomenon. Simultaneously, commercialisation – the increased use of money in society and an increased focus on rearing cattle to sell, meant that, as Realeboga pointed out above, 'nowadays you are rich in the bank'.

Accounts from around Africa, as we saw in chapter 2, mostly highlight gender inequalities in livestock production and women's lack of control over livestock assets (Curry 1996, Njuki and Sanginga 2013a, Chanamuto and Hall 2015) and especially larger livestock such as cattle (Njuki and Mburu 2013, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b, Chanamuto and Hall 2015). Research has shown that these gender inequalities often increase as a consequence of commercialisation and the demands for increased productivity of livestock production, and women's control over and access to livestock products diminishes (Dahl 1987, Hodgson 1999b, Broch-Due and Hodgson 2000, Kergna et al. 2010, Kristjanson et al. 2010, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b). Even when entry into the commercial market system has been seen to weaken unequal traditional gender roles (Batliwala and Dhanraj 2007), women have been excluded from decision making in relation to breeding and sales of livestock due to male dominance, as Bhanotra et al.'s (2015) study in India has shown.

Ways to empower women economically through agriculture have seldom focused on enabling access to beef cattle, but have rather been centred around crop production, small stock or perhaps milk production. It is generally pointed out that small stock is a more suitable livestock project for women as they are seen as being more likely to be able to keep control over them (Distefano 2013, Chanamuto and Hall 2015, Hovorka 2015). Commercialisation of cattle production in Botswana has led to changes for farmers on communal land, and there are large herds on communal land that operate on a commercial basis (Behnke 1987). However, as I show

below, in Ghanzi the need for cash together with the commercial potential of beef production has motivated some women to buy their own cattle.

### **Need for cash motivating engagement in cattle production**

In 2013, all the women that I interviewed who came from cattle farming families stated that their family sold more cattle now than they used to. Thirty-four out of the forty women cattle owners I interviewed stated that one reason for having cattle was the need for cash, and most attributed their engagement in cattle farming to the increased need for money even when other reasons were also mentioned. For example, Omponye saw a link between the possibility of being able to sell cattle to the export beef market to obtain cash and women's increased involvement. The women who sold cattle today, she suggested, do it not only to buy diesel for their borehole pumps and vehicles, but also to be able to take care of what was seen as women's household responsibilities such as food and clothes. 'In the past' it could be done without money, whereas today, it was not possible, Omponye assured me. The ability to fulfil perceived gender expectations had changed for Omponye as a woman, and the change was linked to money, which in turn was linked to cattle and the commercial market.

Both Omponye and Selina further highlighted an increased need for money together with a general lack of income opportunity as factors influencing the increase in women's independent cattle ownership. Although women were also engaged in wage labour, there were limited opportunities in Ghanzi District, where cattle farming is the predominant activity. However, some of the women cattle owners were employed as cleaners or administrative staff at the Rural Administration Centre (RAC), or at local village administration offices.

For Kenosi, the middle aged Mokgalagadi widow a small herd of cattle grazing fifty kilometres outside Ncojane village, life today was connected both to the changing roles of wives, and to the increased focus on a monetary economy. She told me that women did not have cattle when she was a child, but that this had changed because of "the kind of lives that women live these days". In the past, she told me, women "were provided for by their husbands [...] but now it is different", she said "because of the modern way of life [...] The modern life started when everything started to get sold [...] everything started to be on the market [...]" (interview, 19 June 2013, Charleshill, translated). That women were involved because of a 'new way of life' was a recurring view among the women in Charleshill sub-district. However, it was unclear why women would be less provided for by their husbands. It could be linked to either an increased need for cash, leaving husbands unable to

provide fully for their wives, or to women's increased demands for independence, and it is a matter for further investigations. A few of the women I spoke to, notably Afrikaner and English cattle owners, held that if they engaged independently in cattle farming, people would think that there was something wrong with their husbands, as it would be a sign of them not being able to provide for their wives.

Sarah, the middle aged Nharo woman who had five cattle grazing in New Xanahas, explained that in her view, more women had cattle independently now because of changing circumstances: "In the past life was easy, because [women] could do bracelets and sell" (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated). Today it was a challenge to access the materials needed, and also there was less demand for traditional jewellery. They could no longer sell bracelets, she said, and so raising cattle was a way to get money. "I chose cattle [instead of goats or chickens] because of the BMC" she said, and pointed out that they will go on to multiply which will enable her to sell them, clarifying that her motivation for cattle farming had to do with their commercial potential.

Sarah assured me that it was unusual for women to have cattle when she grew up. Today they needed money, she explained, and apart from occasionally getting cash through the government's drought relief programme, there were no other ways to get money. It was because of this 'new life' that women have their own cattle, she said. Kenosi and Hilya further highlighted the lack of rainfall meant that reliable crop production was not possible, and this, in combination with restrictions on hunting, meant that they now had to buy what they needed, and thus needed more cash than previously. The lack of rainfall implying less opportunity for both cash and subsistence products was a recurring topic among the women cattle owners in Charleshill sub-district, and cattle were seen as an attractive alternative.

Kagiso, the Bakgalagadi widow who owns a fenced Ghanzi Farm, emphasised that she saw a lot of young Batswana women who made a living from cattle. Further, she highlighted what we have seen in quotes from other women – that women with smaller herds on non-fenced communal grazing land were interested in commercial cattle production, and looked after them in communal areas where they bought feed for them, looked after their health and then sold them. "This is something that started with the establishment of the BMC" (interview 6 December 2013, Ghanzi Farms), she added, stressing the commercial incentive, and explained that this change began in the 1970s and proceeded very gradually "since the establishment of Botswana Meat commission, people have always reared

cattle because they would sell to Botswana Meat Commission” (ibid.). Kagiso here coupled the increase in commercial incentives for cattle farming to an increase in women engaging in cattle production on non-fenced communal grazing land.

While talking to Ray at the Tshootsha cattle market in Charleshill sub-district about women’s cattle ownership, he pointed out that things were changing. Ray was a middle-aged Motswana man with a small herd of cattle grazing 20 km from Tshootsha village on non-fenced communal grazing land. He regarded his cattle as a hobby more than as a way to support himself, and he worked as a teacher in agricultural sciences. “In the old days, cattle were for men and goats were for women”, he explained (field notes 17 July, Tshootsha cattle market). Traditionally, he said, everyone in the area was dependent on cattle, but it was not a commercial activity. “Now, it is [about] money – women also need money” (ibid.). Ray thus saw a clear link between the commercialisation of cattle production and women’s involvement.

#### **Making claims to the formal beef market**

Women’s claims to the commercial beef market are further illustrated by their choice of breeds. As discussed in chapter 4, young heavy cattle fetch the best price at the market, and so the use of exotic breeds that produce heavier calves than the native ‘Tswana’ breed has increased. Mwaka, a young Motswana single mother with 20 cattle, Bao, an old married Nharo lady grazing her five cattle in New Xanahas and Boineelo, a middle aged Motswana widow with 49 cattle, all decided to use artificial insemination in order to introduce Brahman, Sussex, and a Brahman-Sussex hybrid respectively, into their herds. “The Sussex look nice” Bao said, “and they are heavy [...] They should be heavy so that when you scale it, you should at least expect something out of it that can make you happy [...] [a good price]” (interview 6 December 2013, New Xanahas, translated). Bao herself had no family history of cattle farming, but she had learnt how to care for her cattle. She had a very small herd on communal land and from a group and gender otherwise not usually associated with cattle ownership and definitely not with commercial production. Nevertheless, she has inseminated the Tswana breed cattle that she was given with Sussex semen. At the government artificial insemination camp in Chobokwane, a farmer can have up to five animals inseminated for a cost of twenty pula a head.

Although descriptions of San relations to cattle tend to draw on lack of cattle traditions and hence knowledge and interest, Bao’s case shows us that such constructions reproduced race as a social category, whilst poverty

linked to social class became depoliticised. When the opportunity arose, Bao engaged in cattle production aiming at commercial activity. She thus destabilised the categories commonly used for boundary maintenance of race (Kent 2002), where racialisation of San people drew on an imagined hunter-gatherer past, and renegotiated class structures by gaining access to reproducible capital and social standing (Ortner 2006, Bolt and Hillbom 2013b), and gendered associations of women in the socio-symbolic realm (Rao 2008) by controlling her own cattle. Further, her actions towards commercial production, while using the cattle for milk on a daily basis, further destabilised the division between subsistence and commercial production as separate systems (Peters 2013). In addition, Bao transgressed the boundaries of what might appear to be opposites when linking subsistence and commercial production to property relations to grazing land (private or communal land rights) (ibid.), and showed that although larger herd owners might sell more animals on a regular basis (Behnke 1987), motivation for keeping even small herds can be linked to commercial interests. Women owning small herds grazing on communal, non-fenced land, also used the technology of artificial insemination to produce exotic breeds. Further, access to this technology might indicate increased ability to benefit from the cattle market.

Bao was far from the only woman with a smaller herd on communal grazing land who chose an exotic breed. Among the forty cattle-owning women that I interviewed, at least thirty-eight had exotic breeds in their herds, and twenty-two of them had cattle on non-fenced communal grazing land.

*Table 4. Native and exotic breeds on fenced and non-fenced land among interviewed women cattle owners.*

	Exotic breed	Mixed Tswana/exotic breed	Tswana breed	Don't know	Total
Fenced	13	3	0	1	17
Non-fenced	9	13	1	0	23
Total	22	16	1	1	40

In addition, the interest in exotic – often known as ‘commercial’ – breeds, is reflected in Ghanzi District at large. In 2012 there were 547 cattle holdings with 5,923 head of cattle in Ghanzi District on communal land with exotic breeds (GoB 2014). There were at the same time 725 holdings with 9,044 Tswana breed cattle and 853 holdings with 62,248 cross-bred



animals. Cross-bred cattle were sometimes the outcome of a managed breeding programme featuring exotic breeds bred into a Tswana herd. Sometimes it was a matter of unplanned interaction with neighbours' cattle. It was however abundantly clear that both the number of holdings that only have the 'traditional' Tswana cattle were in the minority on communal land in Ghanzi District, as are the total number of traditional Tswana cattle. The corresponding numbers on a national level told a different story, with holdings keeping only Tswana breeds amounting to 56,555; holdings stocking exclusively exotic breeds numbering only 5,316; and 22,755 holdings keeping crosses (GoB 2014). Still, a significant number of the cattle holdings on communal land in Botswana kept at least some exotic breeds. Accessing the market through access to the technology (Ribot and Peluso 2003) of 'commercial' breeds was thus of interest to farmers on non-fenced grazing land.

Further, in contrast to Ransom's (2011) findings that farmers on communal land tend to sell their animals when they are around four years old ('oxen system'), the women that I met in Ghanzi who were farming on communal land in 2013 deliberately chose cattle breeds that produced heavy calves at weaner age solely for the purpose of obtaining a higher price for each individual calf. This raises the interesting question as to whether there had been a general change in cattle farming practices, or whether this information identified only a local change in cattle practices on the communal grazing lands in Ghanzi.

In addition, according to a majority of the women cattle owners I talked to in Charleshill sub-district, one of their biggest problems was a 'lack of market'. While able to produce marketable cattle, their biggest problem, I was told repeatedly, was that no one would buy their cattle. In contrast to Ronald, the consultant to the Parliament on issues of the BMC and the decline of the beef industry, and other experts in Gaborone who underlined the lack of turnover and supply of cattle as a major problem for the BMC and the export beef industry, these women held that they had more cattle to sell, if only someone would buy them for a decent price.

Like many of the women I talked to, Hilya complained that the prices were low and that there were insufficient opportunities to sell their cattle but that "If the government starts to buy our cattle all women are going to look after cattle!" (interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill village). The solution, she suggested, was to create a local market so that farmers who cannot afford to take their cattle to Lobatse could sell their cattle there, or break the export monopoly. Further, it would save the BMC from their precarious situation of having an insufficient turnover, she held. She said that:

[W]e also want to make our own BMC in Ghanzi. The farmers' association, we want the government to help us to make our own BMC in Ghanzi [...] the people in Kalahari have a lot of cattle, that's why we want them to come and make a BMC. We can save it [the BMC], otherwise they must give way for selling straight to the EU. (Interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill village)

The opening of a new BMC abattoir or alternatively an end of the BMC export monopoly was a recurring theme at the meetings of the Ghanzi Beef Farmers' Association, where predominantly large-scale farmers, and notably many white, male farmers participated. The experts in Gaborone, such as Ronald and employees at the Ministry of Agriculture had understood this, and often referred to the 'rich white farmers in Ghanzi' as the ones most motivated to break the BMC export monopoly and to build an export abattoir in Ghanzi District. However, it was also a recurring theme among the women with different sized herds on non-fenced land in Charleshill sub-district. In fact, if there was one thing that women cattle owners in Charleshill sub-district, and not least those living under poorer material conditions, asked me to write in 'my book', it was that they needed more opportunities to sell their cattle at decent prices, and they often suggested a local abattoir.

In contrast to the many accounts referred to above of women losing benefits, control, access and agency when people in 'cattle cultures' start focusing on selling animals (Dahl 1987, Talle 1988, Hodgson 1999a, Kristjanson et al. 2010, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b), women cattle farmers in Ghanzi told me that the opposite was true for them. The commercial potential of beef production had motivated women to engage in cattle production in ways perceived as new. The possibility to sell cattle has thus encouraged differently situated women to seek independent ownership of cattle and to become engaged in cattle farming. Although Bakgalagadi and Batswana women have to some extent had their own cattle for decades, as Solway (1988) and Peters (1984) point out, it seems to have remained a secret, or an exception, or the privilege of the wealthy few. Now it is talked about as common practice in Ghanzi among women who have been considered to be 'distant' from cattle and those framed as 'milkers' and 'farmers' wives'.

Notably, whereas the women in Hovorka's (2006) study could draw on their traditional association with chickens to enter the male sphere of commercial agricultural production through urban poultry farming, the women cattle owners of Ghanzi challenge an arena where two traditional 'male spheres' intersect: cattle and commercialism production. Remarkably, women cattle owners with cattle herds of different sizes and

grazing both on fenced and non-fenced land held that this development had to do with changing gender relations.

### **Developments of women's property relations to cattle and changes in gender relations**

Not only were women, as I showed in the previous chapter, challenging ideas of 'traditional' ways for women to relate to cattle, but a common view was that this was something new; something that their mothers would not have been able to do. Nine out of twelve women grouped as 'farmers' wives' thought that there were more women in cattle farming these days, and two of them referred explicitly only to 'black' women. Among the women categorised as 'milkers', seven out of twelve thought women were more involved these days than previously. Finally, out of the sixteen women seeing themselves as coming from traditions where women are 'distant' from cattle, fourteen thought that women were more engaged today. Notably, it was only those women who were themselves engaged in ways that differed from the ways that their 'cultural tradition' specified that perceived an increase in women's participation. Further, as illustrated below, the women from the 'distant' and 'milkers' groups who saw themselves as engaged in ways different from their 'traditions' suggested, related the increase of women's control over cattle to changing gender relations, whereas apart from Christine, the rest of the 'farmers' wives' did not.

When I asked Hilya about changes in women's involvement in cattle production, she related them to the development of gender equal laws. As described in chapter 6, Hilya, the middle aged Herero woman, farmed together with her husband, and while they decided on management and sales together, Hilya worked in the administration of the RAC in Charleshill during the week. Women of her parent's generation, she said, could not have been involved in the way she was. In the past, Hilya told me, "a female was nothing. Nowadays a female is someone who can manage everything" (interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill village). Those who were abused by their husband today, she added, are those who do not know the law. She also believed that the reason for the increase of women engaged in cattle production could be found in the meetings held by the Department of Gender Affairs: "they say that nowadays the cultures are broken by the law" (ibid.). Women talk to each other, she explained, and these days, women know their rights:

These days there are laws that protect the woman. Before a woman could not go to the kgotla to complain that the husband is beating her, but now she can. Before the culture was hiding these things. (Interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill village)

Hilya blamed her 'culture' for women's subordination, and saw how laws encouraging gender equality worked against cultural practices. Similarly, both Omponye, the middle-aged Motswana widow from Ncojane whom we met previously and Selina, the older, divorced Mokgalagadi woman who lived in Charleshill village, stressed 'modernity' as a reason for women's increased involvement with cattle. In this way, they situated themselves as Herero, Bakgalagadi or Batswana women *of today*, which means something different to them than being a Herero, Bakgalagadi or Batswana woman *in the past*. By doing so, they constructed themselves as 'modern' women discursively and in practice through control over cattle. Thus gendered ethnicity, as the process in which gendered notions of cultural difference are communicated, is both reproduced and challenged. Reproduction of cultural distinctiveness is being reinforced through boundary maintenance (Kent 2002) by the construction of oneself as part of a particular group of Herero, Bakgalagadi or Batswana speakers, and at the same time challenged by the distancing of oneself from what was seen as the 'typical' gendered relations of that group. Cattle, which were often connected to the 'traditional' way of life, were in this way also connected to 'modern' gender relations. Not only could cattle ownership increase women's possibilities of obtaining cash, it also had the potential to create a 'modern woman' in the process.

Hilya further told me that that both women and cows have been discriminated against, as male cattle are preferred because they fetch a higher price on the market. She laughed and continued to explain that in the past:

[I]f a woman wants to do something, you find that she would be asked: 'what does the husband say'? But if it is the husband who wants to do something, no one will ask him 'what does the woman say?'. We suffered. (Interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill)

She continued to explain that:

Nowadays because we have the [Department of Gender Affairs], they give the power to women to know that we have the responsibility to do everything [...] Now we know that everything is equal. I can manage my farm. I can do everything myself. (Interview 16 June 2013, Charleshill)

Although I did not have the chance to go with Hilya to a cattle market, I did observe other women selling cattle without being questioned. The message of gender equality that the government had promoted through the Department of Gendered Affairs had reached Hilya and contributed to her views on what she as a woman should and should not do. Nevertheless, established and rooted ideas of gender inequality challenged this change as longstanding ideas of what it meant to be husband and wife were not only questioned but also recreated, as we saw in the previous chapter – not least from the English and Afrikaner ‘farmers’ wives’.

Kabomo, the older widowed Motswana woman whom we met in previous chapters, compared the present situation to when she was a young woman in the early 1970s, “Cattle were for men only”, she said, and added that these days “cattle are for both men and women” (interview 19 June 2013, Ncojane, translated). Furthermore, she added that in the past, “men were overpowering women and then they did not have the chance to have their own cattle”. Now they were no longer under that power but could do things for themselves, Kabomo told me, and “now you find that women are opening their eyes, and they are able to [have their own cattle], when they get money they buy cows [...] (interview 19 June 2013, Ncojane, translated).

In Kabomo’s description, cattle were linked to gendered power relations in the sense that when women had cattle of their own, they also had more power in relation to men. Nowadays, men and women had a similar approach to cattle, she explained and “some men would go get a brand for their wife and then brand cattle for them so that they are theirs” (ibid.). According to Kabomo, gender relations has changed for the better so that today women could have cattle of their own in a way that had not been possible a few decades ago. Her description made it clear that some men had also been a part of this process, supporting women to have their own brands and giving them cattle. Kabomo got her own brand in 1997 and before that she used her husband’s brand. She explained that there were not a lot of women who had their own brands when she was young but that today, women wanted to stand on their own feet. There were women in the government now who were speaking for other women, she went on, the government supports women, underlining that that is why women have cattle today.

Botshelo instead highlighted the fact that married women today were more involved in the couple’s cattle operation. She said that if a woman simply stayed at home and did not know how many cattle she had, the man could just sell some and use the money as he pleased. “So that’s why these

days women also want to go and see what is going on in the farm” (interview 27 June 2013, Botshelo’s farm, Charleshill). This, she confirmed, is a new role that the women around her had, and one that allowed them increased influence in terms of decision making. As was noted above, Van Aelst and Holvoet (2016) have shown that the way women benefit from joint family resources depends on the nature of her relationship to the husband.

Leano, the Mokgalagadi woman who came to Charleshill village to sell dried fish at the market and had two heifers on her boyfriend’s fenced farm south of Charleshill village, was certain that gender relations in cattle production have changed. Women of her mother’s generation, Leano explained, were not able to do what she is doing today. “In the past women didn’t own cattle of their own. They would own cattle [together with] a man. Women were responsible for the household and men for the cattle” (interview 1 August 2013, Charleshill market, translated). When I asked Leano how it is today, she explained that “now there is equality, things changed with the generations. Now both men and women can take care of the household” (ibid). Further, she has perceived that “most work concerning cattle was for men only, but now they are both responsible for taking care of cattle” (ibid.).

Women’s engagement in cattle production was again linked to gender relations. Bao, the married middle-aged Nharo woman, and Sarah, the non-married Nharo woman in her early thirties, both of whom we met earlier, agreed that there were more women today than ‘in the old days’ possessing cattle in their community. Further, they also assured me that these days there were a lot of Nharo women in New Xanahas who had their own cattle. Sarah explained that because men have power over women, the women want their own cattle so that they can decide over the animals themselves, and this suggested that cattle will increase women’s possibilities to escape subordination to their husbands.

When I asked Masego, the young, single Mokgalagadi woman with twenty cattle grazing outside Ncojane, about how her mother related to cattle when she was growing up, she said that she had never heard about women being able to take care of cattle when she was a child. The women would take care of the fields, she said and “knew that the cattle were for men, not women” (interview 18 June 2013, translated). Today, however, “a woman can stand for herself and have her own cattle” (interview 18 June 2013, translated). Omponye, the middle-aged Mokgalagadi woman from Ncojane, emphasised that she took care of vaccinations, sales and stray cattle herself. She held that life today was different from the past and that

“what men can do, women can also do” (interview 17 June 2013, Charleshill, translated).

By talking about women’s cattle ownership and control as something new or recent, the women reproduced ideas of ethnicities as being linked to both the value of cattle, and the inequality of the sexes. At the same time, they constructed themselves as independent women breaking with these traditions. In this way, shifts in gender performances alter gender relations, while simultaneously reasserting what are seen as traditional gender practices (Nightingale 2006). In this case, however, the traditions are referred to as out-dated and from the past, whereas ‘these days’ were seen as being characterised by changing gender relations. As Rao (2008) shows, it is possible that women can be just as engaged as men in an agricultural activity in material terms, whilst in the socio-symbolic realm their engagement may be defined as being only secondary – or even have their existence denied. In becoming aware of such distinctions, women cattle owners in Ghanzi who are engaged in ways other than formulated by established traditions, are able to frame themselves as part of new, progressive gender relations. In this way, women drew on stories of past property relations to cattle that are characterised by women’s lack of access and control, in order to frame their present property claims to cattle as being something new and better. Thus, while the farmers in Fortmann’s (1995) study used stories of past property relations to legitimise those same property rights, these women in Ghanzi drew on stories of the past to highlight the value of their current cattle practices (cf. Cornwall 2001) and their ability to both access and maintain control over cattle. Stories of how it came to be this way thus explain their choices, which are generally pictured as exceptions (Rose 1994).

What we see in the stories of the women that I interviewed are references to, and descriptions of, women’s increased legal rights and status as adults in their own rights. Throughout history, cattle-rearing has been a common culturally valued project for men in Botswana. Although there might have been women owning cattle as long as men have done, it has not been socially sanctioned as being something appropriate for women. However, what seems to be happening in Ghanzi, at least among those groups of women connected to cattle in the socio-symbolic realm as milkers, or pictured as being distant from cattle, is that the heading of cattle operations is becoming an increasingly valued and socially accepted project (Ortner 2001, 2006).

According to these women, the fact that their social positions today are more equal to men was linked to their engagement in commercial cattle

production and cattle control. Their stories suggested that changing gender relations open up new possibilities to engage independently in cattle production, motivated by the possibility for commercial production. However, not all women were able to gain control over their cattle, and not all wanted to, and not all those with individual control over cattle found it a positive experience. As we saw in the previous chapter, some of the ‘farmers’ wives’ who would like to engage more in the cattle operation felt restrained by their husbands, and some of the ‘milkers’ would have preferred to share the burden of cattle farming with someone. In addition, there were women who had joint control, management and ownership with their husband, who were content with their situation and did not necessarily crave individual ownership.

While the government’s gender equality messages have facilitated women’s access to and control over cattle, their accounts reveal that they not only benefitted from the commercial market but also benefitted from increased social status relative to men. It is also of importance to note that it was the women with control over their cattle who linked their involvement in cattle production to gender equality and control rather than simply ownership (ibid.). Their control over their cattle further allowed them to benefit in terms of social positions through more equal gender relations. Women’s relative access to key resources both in legislation and in practice is – as Agarwal (1994a, 1994b) shows for women’s access to land in India – of relevance to them in Ghanzi. Women’s property relations to cattle thus make a difference for social positions that goes beyond that of a natural resource or a measure of wealth. Intersecting with gender, relations to cattle made a difference in terms of how a woman was positioned as a woman in relation to other women as well as to men.

Further, gender equality in legislation relating to property rights that has provided women with adult status, including the right to sign contracts, and this gives women today the possibility to obtain loans and grants, and to engage in borehole syndicates without being dependent on a man.

#### **Access to loans and grants facilitating women’s control over cattle**

Just as for Realeboga in the narrative at the beginning of this chapter, loans and grants of different types enabled women to buy their own cattle. CEDA loans, YDF grants and borehole syndicates generated from government efforts to encourage entrepreneurship in rural areas, discussed in chapter 4, have become means for women to gain access to the capital needed to start up or develop their cattle operations. Out of the forty women cattle owners interviewed, six were involved in borehole syndicates, three had obtained



YDF grants, one of which also had a loan at the National Development Bank, three had obtained CEDA loans and three had been granted cattle from the government's poverty relief programme. Notably, ten of the beneficiaries came from groups where women were thought of as 'traditionally' distant from cattle, four were Herero women associated with the role of milking, and only two were from the group thought of as farmers' wives, notably two Afrikaner women with CEDA loans.

For Afrikaans-speaking Annelies, the CEDA grant was crucial in making it possible to start her cattle operation. She lived on a fenced Ghanzi Farm with her husband who worked as a piping contractor. Annelies said with conviction that there were more independent female cattle farmers today than there used to be because of the CEDA loans. Both she and her husband used to work in the tourist business. When CEDA was established with its subsidised loans in 2001, her father decided that each of his children should have two camps on his large fenced Ghanzi Farm, and so Annelies decided to obtain a CEDA loan to start the cattle operation she had always dreamed of.

Although neither Elisabeth nor Kagiso, whom we met earlier, had applied for CEDA loans, they both pointed out that once women realised that they could sell cattle and get money, the CEDA loan meant that it was possible to borrow money on the same terms as men. "The government is helping a lot and is not discriminating between men and women" (interview 31 October 2013, Kagiso's farm, Ghanzi Farms) said Kagiso, and Elisabeth assured me that if she were younger, she would have obtained a CEDA loan and expanded her cattle operation. Realeboga and Masego, the two unmarried cattle owners from Ncojane, who had both received a YDF grant, also identified these resources as a reason why there were more women in cattle farming these days. Masego pointed out that with such grants even poor young people could start a cattle project.

In Ghanzi, women did apply for and were granted YDF grants or CEDA loans, and the widespread knowledge about and appreciation of the existence of these grants was playing a part in creating imaginable possibilities for women. Tjavanga and her older aunt Kunouee, a widow with her own herd of cattle, both saw women as potential cattle owners and cattle managers. They both thought that the number of women with their own cattle herds would continue to increase. However, they underlined that what was needed was help from the government in terms of start-up money, and that with the availability of start-up money from CEDA loans and YDF grants, the possibilities for women's independent cattle ownership had increased. The *de facto* possibility to receive government grants that they could use for cattle

production not only made it theoretically possible for women to engage independently in cattle production to a larger extent, but also sent a signal that this practice was acceptable. Selina related women's increased participation in cattle production to the availability of the CEDA loans: "there are lots of women in cattle production now because even CEDA are providing women with cattle and that does make them more interested in the cattle production" (interview 10 June 2013, Charleshill village, translated).

Moreover, although neither the CEDA loans nor the YDF grants target women nor cattle activities exclusively, women in Ghanzi realised that they represented a possible means to pursue cattle projects. Notably, seeking, obtaining and using such loans and grants, together with engagement in bore hole syndicates, served to bring women's interest in pursuing cattle projects out into the open. Women were making new property claims to cattle, using loans and grants targeted at agriculture and entrepreneurship activities to begin cattle operations independently. In fact, three out of five groups of women who participated in the 'women's entrepreneurship initiative' at the Department of Gender Affairs in Ghanzi chose to engage in beef production. According to the records at the YDF office in Charleshill, thirteen out of thirty-four women who were granted YDF money for beef cattle between 2009 and 2013 in Ghanzi were women, signalling that cattle projects are becoming imaginable possibilities for young women in Ghanzi.

Although there has been no specific government effort to engage women in cattle production *per se*, there were loans and grants linked to entrepreneurship activities, as well as efforts to promote women's engagement in commercial activities. Women in Ghanzi were using these opportunities to start up cattle operations. Thus, women were negotiating their access to cattle by manoeuvring within structural constraints, making active choices to pursue cattle projects. Government loans and grants thus offer access to capital for women who would otherwise not have been able to start their cattle production, such as Masego, Realeboga, Annelies and Tjavanga, thus allowing them to engage in the cattle projects that they had always dreamed of.

The dynamics of gaining, maintaining and controlling access (Ribot and Peluso 2003) to cattle and cattle assets have changed with an increased privileging of commercial production on both fenced and non-fenced land. With access to capital from grants and loans, together with access to knowledge, labour technology and the market, women were engaging in cattle production. Through grants and loans, women who would not otherwise have the possibility, gained access to cattle. They maintained their access by managing the herd for its survival and growth. With grants

and loans available that were large enough to start a cattle operation, women with fewer economic assets could also enter the cattle sector. However, CEDA loans and YDF grants were still only available to those who could find them, those who could read and write or had help to do so, and to those who can arrange access to grass and water. So although these loans and grants might destabilise gendered structures of access to cattle, and to some extent challenge class structures by granting access to capital to those in lower classes, in practice they might still exclude those of the lowest socio-economic class without family or contacts who could help them with access to grazing land. The poverty relief programmes giving cattle to 'destitute' people, such as Sarah, Bao and C'goise however, are only accessible to those without capital and those of the lowest class.

### **Changing women's property relations– rebranding gender relations?**

This chapter has shown how an increased need for money in society together with the opportunities to obtain cash through cattle sales on the formal market has led women to engage in cattle production in ways perceived as new. In contrast to previous studies elsewhere in Africa (Dahl 1987, Talle 1988, Hodgson 1999a, Kristjanson et al. 2010, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b), I have shown that women can also increase their control over cattle in the wake of commercialisation in ways that allow them to renegotiate gender relations from a stronger position.

As Batliwala and Dhanraj (2007) point out, although research has demonstrated that women's access to economic resources, such as credit, can weaken traditional gender roles, it does not necessarily lead to their overall empowerment. When used to start up cattle operations, the women in Ghanzi are, however, challenging structural constraints linked to gender, ethnicity, race and class by using grants to overcome their lack of access to capital. This is significant, in that cash constraints are suggested by Kristjanson et al. (2014) as an important reason why women in different countries might not buy livestock.

I have shown how women are motivated to engage in cattle production by the need for cash. This supports Waithanji et al. (2013) conclusion from their study in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique that men and women preferred to produce livestock products that they were able to market and would be able to control the income made from the sales. However, whereas the women in their study were active in selling livestock products, notably eggs and milk, as well as small stock, especially chickens and in some cases goats, I have shown that women can also, under certain

conditions, control live cattle sales at formal markets while benefitting both in terms of material welfare and social positions.

As Peters (1984) shows, the struggle over resources is also about the struggle over meaning, and she demonstrates that connotations of certain terms used to denote a group of people with particular access to a resource makes a difference to how property relations are interpreted. Further, Peters (2013) has established that the terms ‘subsistence’ and ‘commercial’ production are loaded with value-laden associations related to evolutionary models of agriculture. Not only, then, is it of importance to be careful with the use of subsistence and commercial farming as linked to property rights to land in order to understand current practices, as I have shown – careless use of the terms ‘communal’ and ‘commercial’ farming as binaries can also mask inequalities between farmers.

Further, as women with small herds on communal land are also interested in commercial production, using longstanding shorthand to categorise farmers runs the risk of glossing over and rendering invisible women’s motivation, capacity and activities, by naturalising or depoliticising inequalities linked to property relations to land based on historically situated relations of gender, ethnicity, race and class. Recognising the challenges that women cattle owners with their animals grazing on communal land face in terms of market access, to an important extent shaped by Botswana’s export to the EU beef market, could be a step towards acknowledging women’s efforts to make claims to the formal market in new ways.

For example, Arora-Jonsson (2013) showed how informal markets can sometimes be more beneficial to women, as those spaces allow them to control, to a larger extent, the conditions under which they trade. The women basket weavers in Arora-Jonsson’s (2013: 223f) study in India chose not to engage in formal markets but preferred to trade with women in other villages, including in-kind exchange. Being women from a low caste with limited bargaining power, turning to informal markets allowed them to maintain quality and control over their sales. Similarly, Waithanji et al. (2013) found that women small scale livestock farmers in Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique to a large extent sold their products at the farm gate rather than at outside markets. Among the women I interviewed in Ghanzi, however, those at different intersections of gender, ethnicity class and race seek out and make claims to the formal market. In this way, I have shown that formal beef markets, when accessible, can be of interest to, and even a preference for, women. Nevertheless, their ability to market their cattle, as

we have seen, depends to important extents on land tenure, herd size and access to technology.

In Ghanzi however, the women with control over their cattle were able to navigate the doubly male sphere of cattle and commercial production. By drawing on narratives of increased gender equality, using grants and loans for agriculture and entrepreneurship and by formalising their cattle ownership through the visual markers of brands, they enforced their property claims. Facilitated by the rigorous implementation of EU traceability regulations where brands are controlled at sales, women were able to control the cattle sales. However, not all women were able to gain control over their cattle. Ideals of farming as a marital project that placed women as either manual workers ('milkers') or in supporting roles ('farmers' wives') and as subordinate to men in the arena of cattle production (and in society) restricted some of these women from claiming control over cattle, while others were able to challenge these 'rules of the game'. Further, not all women with control over cattle found it positive, but felt obligated to keep the herd in order not to upset social relations.

Whereas women engaged in livestock production elsewhere tend not to be involved in management and sales of cattle, as Bhanotra et al.'s (2015) study from India shows and Njuki and Sanginga (2013b) discuss for Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, some of the women cattle owners in Ghanzi negotiated their property relations to include control over management decisions, sales and how to spend the money. Access to capital, technology, labour, knowledge and the market placed women under varying farming conditions, but, as I showed in chapter 6, while women of higher class were able to benefit from their cattle to a higher degree in material and monetary terms, it was not least the Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women – or those thought of as 'distant' from cattle – with smaller herds on non-fenced communal land who had managed to gain, maintain and control access to their cattle.

Rather than making change agents of women who are engaging in government rural poverty alleviation programmes, that Batliwala and Dhanraj (2007) have shown can be detrimental to the women's own empowerment processes, the women cattle owners in Ghanzi are engaging in cattle production in an individual manner and are not targeted by specific initiatives. Batliwala and Dhanraj (2007) show how poverty relief and gender equality efforts focusing on women's economic empowerment can lead to overwhelming workloads due to new time consuming activities. While the economic turnover suggested that projects were successful and women were praised as models of entrepreneurship, stress related to

increasing activities escalated under the pressure to repay the loans. Although some women in Ghanzi were targeted through poverty relief programmes, their choice of cattle was their own. Further, other women, on the other hand, drew on different grants and loans in order to start their cattle operations. It was not a concerted effort aimed at either women or cattle activities specifically, but stemmed from their own initiatives to engage in these transactions and pursue cattle activities.

Keeping cattle on a small scale is not a time consuming activity, as they graze unsupervised most of the day, and thus the women did not suffer from overwhelming work burdens. Further, as the practical work is still to a large extent male coded, apart from the Herero community, it was socially acceptable for women in all communities, including the wealthier strata of Herero to engage male relatives or employed cattle-hands to do the manual labour. Thus, whereas livestock projects for women have focused on small stock because they are more likely to maintain control over them in the long term, as Distefano (2013) suggests, I show that certain women can gain, maintain and control access to cattle and benefit in important ways once they do.

Notably, my focus was on those women who own cattle, and implications for the cattle-less women remain to be investigated. Whereas women positioned at intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class as ‘milkers’, ‘farmers’ wives’ and as ‘distant’ from cattle are all able to benefit from their cattle ownership in some material ways through either their own or their husband’s control over the cattle, the extent to which they were able to benefit in terms of social positions and preferences of material welfare depended on their individual control over cattle. Whereas such control was to some extent influenced by marital status, it also depended, as Van Aelst and Holvoet (2016) have shown, on the specific dynamics of individual marriages.

Ribot and Peluso (2003) show that the ability to benefit from things is linked to access to technology, capital, labour, markets, knowledge and authority, and how access to these things can take place through social identity or through negotiations of other social relationships.

I have shown how intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class position women differently in terms of such access, and how the production of large livestock species such as cattle can be specifically resource intensive. As Njuki and Sanginga (2013b) argue, different livestock and livestock products have different importance for women. While they emphasise easy access to the animals and their control, and thus agree that “it is widely recognised that small stock such as goats, sheep and poultry

are especially important for women” (Njuki and Sanginga 2013b: 3), I have shown that it is also important to consider the benefits women can gain once they do control a certain livestock species. However, thinking access through cattle ownership, I have shown how access to the elements that allows women to benefit from a resource outlined above (Ribot and Peluso 2003) are important, but also that ownership and control over a local key livestock species can, when old and new values interact, also enable access to technology, capital, labour, markets, knowledge, authority as well as better positions for negotiations of social identity and other social relationships.

While Njuki and Mburu (2013) note that for the women that did own cattle in Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique where their study took place, it contributed more to their total livestock holding than other species combined. Whereas this might be expected because of the size of the cattle, I have shown that cattle are also important when considering the potential of livestock to further women’s social positions. As such, a livestock species that generates substantial monetary income when marketed and with a key prestige position in society, such as cattle in Botswana, has the potential to benefit women to a great extent once under their control. In this way, as Rankin (2003) suggests, traditional values and new values interact during social change such as commercialisation, and I have shown in what ways women can benefit from cattle ownership in terms of both commercial values and social status linked to the ‘traditional’ status of cattle.

Whitehead and Tsikata (2003) show that formalising customary law might lead to solidifying of formerly flexible practices, and Oboler (1996) has showed how the traditional property rights to cattle that Nandi women in Kenya had under customary law – although not necessarily equal to those of men – have been eroded through the introduction of commercial production or by manipulation of this law in its formalisation. As Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi (2008) note, formalisation of rights and privatisation of property often occur hand in hand. Although women might also have been excluded from property rights to cattle in Botswana, I have shown how some women in Ghanzi have been able to make use of the formalised version of individual cattle ownership, securing their claims through the visual property markers of brands. Property claims to cattle become enforceable through visible ownership markers of brands. The visibility of property relations, as Rose (1994) suggests, enables enforcement of property claims.

In Ghanzi, *de facto* privatisation is strengthened by the focus on individual sales. Formalisation of cattle ownership through visible brands can signal, as Rose (1994) suggests, the end of negotiability of claims and can indicate fixed property relations. Whereas such ownership security could also be gained from, for example, earmarking, the cattle brands are in Botswana recognised by the state and necessary for sales, thus legitimising the claims and facilitating *de facto* control over *de jure* owned cattle. By means of *de jure* property rights manifested through personal cattle brands, women control access to their cattle and the potential economic benefits. The possibility of gaining and maintaining access to the cattle market in Ghanzi depends, as we have seen, on historic property relations to fenced grazing land, built on a society with high class and race segregation. Formalisation of property rights to cattle through the use of brands has led to a visible privatisation of the animals. Realeboga, who proudly showed off her brand in the introductory story above, was in fact holding a socially and legally sanctioned tool to enforce her claims to her cattle (Sikor and Lund 2009).

While government gender equality efforts around the world have in many cases focused on formalisation of property rights, researchers have pointed towards other structural constraints for women (Arora-Jonsson 2014). However, there are women in Ghanzi who navigate within such constraints and use loans, grants and brands to actually advance their cattle ownership and make claims to property relations generally associated with men. In these cases, women are the *de jure* and *de facto* owners with rights to decide over herd management and sales, whereas their husbands, children and employees become holders of partial rights to certain cattle assets, such as milk or money from sales. In this way, whereas research has shown that bundles of rights to cattle (and other livestock) commonly grant women partial rights to cattle owned and ultimately controlled by men (Njuki and Mburu 2013, Johnson, et al. 2015), I have shown how bundles of rights to cattle in Ghanzi are today sometimes gendered differently.

Changes in gender relations in society where women are gaining increased status as adults in their own right have provided women with a platform from which to negotiate new property relations to cattle. As Ramdas et al. (2001) show, women's access to 'traditionally male' livestock knowledge can give them confidence when interacting with others in society. However, I have shown in chapter 6 that women are differently positioned in relation to distinct types of cattle knowledge where Afrikaners and English are expected to know more about administration and the economics of cattle management, Herero women are expected to have



practical knowledge of the daily cattle work and Batswana, Bakgalagadi and Nharo women are not expected to know anything in particular. Further, women in groups where 'traditional' knowledge is female coded can instead gain prestige from acquiring 'new' male coded knowledge on commercial production.

As Agarwal (1994b) emphasised, legal rights for women that ensure their equal access to valued natural resources make a difference for gender relations. However, as Jackson (2003) pointed out, unless it is socially acceptable for women to act on such rights, gendered change will be difficult. In Ghanzi, what constitutes possible, appropriate and even imaginable relations to cattle might be changing. In this sense, the way that culturally constituted projects are carried out (Ortner 2001, 2006) seems to be changing. With messages of gender equality from DGA and organisations working for women's rights, together with increased access to funds and other resources, women have started to take a visible place in the cattle production network of Ghanzi.

Seeing women's engagement in cattle production as participating in culturally constituted projects, in Ortner's (2001) terms, highlights their efforts to bring about change for the better, and, as Arora-Jonsson (2013: 7) suggests, brings into the focus of rural development that which people themselves do as they consciously mobilise resources and networks to create their future. Women in Ghanzi worked to engage in cattle projects 'traditionally' constituted as male and made claims to the male coded sphere of commercial production. Thus not only can women use culturally constituted projects traditionally valued for women to renegotiate gender relations, as Ortner (2001) shows, some of the women in Ghanzi are renegotiating the gendered character of culturally constituted projects. Their control over cattle has also enabled them to negotiate their individual gender relations from a stronger position.

The telling of stories was important in this context. As Rose (1994) suggests, stories about property relations not only contain descriptions about a range of choices, but they also explain what are perceived as exceptions. Stories turn events into experiences and make sense of actions. Stories about 'how it used to be' and 'how things got to be this way' structure ideas about what women's property relations to cattle mean. However, the way women use stories from 'the old days' to explain choices of today drew not only on property relations that they wished to reproduce, as emphasised in Rose's (1994) and Fortmann's (1995) accounts, but were also used by the women to underline new claims on cattle and the commercial cattle market that position them as 'modern' and 'independent'

women. As Arora-Jonsson (2009) shows, the rhetoric of modernity and individuality can in fact make it harder for women to organise around shared gendered issues. In a comparison of women's organising in villages in Sweden and India, a discourse placing women in the Swedish context as being already modern and equal made it harder for them to challenge certain structures, whereas the women in India were more comfortable with openly fighting for changing gender relations. The women cattle owners in Ghanzi, on the other hand, engaged in cattle projects despite oppressive structures that placed them as subordinate to men and without control over cattle by using means available to them to realise new imaginable possibilities through property claims to cattle.

## Conclusions

Accounts from women cattle owners in Ghanzi District suggest that not only can the commercialisation of cattle production, in some contexts, encourage women to gain individual ownership and control over cattle, but also that control over cattle can be linked to changing gender relations. While experience of increased gender equality has facilitated women's control over cattle, their control over cattle has also strengthened their individual social positions, including gender relations relative to men and to other farmers. Women's stories about cattle as a male affair in the past has emphasised the importance of their control over cattle today.

The women's accounts suggest that heading cattle operations is becoming a culturally valued project for women, in Ortner's (2001, 2006) terms, and thus in some way is reshaping the way such projects are gendered.

Notably, not all women cattle owners, nor even all those with control over cattle, benefitted in terms of social position or a sense of personhood. It seems as though women who are engaged in cattle production in ways beyond what was suggested by their socio-symbolic positions as 'milkers', 'farmers' wives' or 'distant' gained a sense of self-worth or personhood from their engagement. Narratives about what women 'normally' do thus place women differently in terms of how they experience themselves as 'full persons'. In this way, certain ways that women are able to draw non-material benefits depend on how they challenge the 'rules of the game' (Kandiyoti 1988, 1998) of their particular associations with a certain livestock species in the socio-symbolic realm (Rao 2008), and thus different property relations, cattle-related activities and knowledge might present distinct opportunities to different women. In this way the various

associations of women as being positioned differently in relation to cattle in the socio-symbolic realm (ibid.), in addition to Ribot and Peluso's (2003) eight points of access outlined earlier, in some ways shape the way that women can benefit from their cattle ownership.

There was also a difference in the extent to which women cattle owners were able to influence the ways in which they used cattle assets for material welfare. The intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class that placed women in a range of positions in relation to access to technology, capital, market and labour, also in some cases shaped the ways in which women were able to access authority to control cattle, and how they could access benefits from the cattle through social identity or via other social relationships, notably marital status.

Nevertheless, the potential benefits, both material and non-material, offered by cattle, exceed those of other livestock species in Ghanzi. As Bobrow-Strain (2009) puts it, cattle are polyvalent in the way that they attach themselves to multiple social, political and economic logics. Women cattle owners in Ghanzi benefit from their cattle in terms of material welfare and social positions in different ways. Perhaps the single major factor that creates a real possibility for women to actually have an independent and personal opportunity for economic and social security is the degree of their *relative control over cattle*, in line with what Agarwal (1994a, 1994b) suggests for land in South Asia. However, shared control over cattle provided similar benefits for some women, whereas others would have to risk disrupting the tranquillity of their household relationships if they were to attempt to enforce claims of cattle control, suggesting that the nature of the marital relationship is a significant factor, as Van Aelst and Holvoet (2016) argue. Marital status intersecting with ethnicity creates different expected roles for different women, and this in turn influences the facility with which they are able to acquire, or even imagine to acquire – or, again, simply wish to acquire – cattle of their own or seek to exercise control over cattle.

Moreover, cattle, with their historical significance for social, political and economic relations in Botswana, are keys to establishing capital, social identity and social relations, as noted above, and thus in themselves generate further access to the eight points Ribot and Peluso (2003) outline for the ability to benefit from a resource. As different species offer different opportunities, there is thus much to be gained from being species specific in analyses of gender in livestock production.



## 8 Conclusions: Changes and Continuities

“These days, cattle are not only for men”

(Kabomo, Ncojane 2013)

“Now, life today is different from life in the past and these days what men can do, women can also do”

(Omponye, Ncojane 2013)

Thinking about women’s cattle ownership by focusing on gendered property relations through an intersectional lens provides us with a framework to explore the various ways in which women access, establish claims over and benefit from their cattle. Women cattle owners in Ghanzi were engaged in cattle production in many different ways – not only in supporting roles focusing on household work or administration, but also working with hands-on cattle tasks, and as managers and owners with control over their cattle. These women were from different social backgrounds and in diverse situations, but had one thing in common: they were all able to benefit, in different ways, from cattle ownership in the setting of commercial beef production. By exploring what happens when women actually do gain or retain cattle ownership in a male dominated sector undergoing commercialisation, I have shown how gendered processes create various challenges and opportunities for different women.

These dynamics are part of rural development in Botswana. Rural development, often thought of as economic progress and efforts to improve the lives of people in rural areas, is also, as Arora-Jonsson (2013) shows, that which people do, not the least through participation in networks, associations and rural communities. Further, rural development can also be, as I have shown, what individuals do outside of concerted

community or group efforts, the way that they make use of government efforts to further economic progress and rural entrepreneurship. Rural development can be that which women do separately in order to change their situation for the better.

## Women claiming cattle and benefitting from ownership

While all of the forty women cattle owners I interviewed benefitted from their cattle ownership to some degree, either through their own access or mediated via other social relationships such as marital status, the extent to which they were able to benefit in terms of material welfare, and in what ways they were able to benefit in terms of social position varied between social categories and individuals. The women cattle owners in Ghanzi had differing property relations and claims to their cattle, and established their claims to cattle assets through marital status, individual brands, as well as through cultural narratives of changing gender relations and women's increasing social status.

Women with both *de jure* ownership and control over cattle used their cattle in social exchanges, as subsistence resources and as commodities in the commercial beef market to obtain cash. This means that these women were able to engage directly in social exchanges in their own right, control subsistence products, decide what animals to sell and when to sell them, as well as what to do with the income they generated.

The money from cattle sales was used in different ways, such as paying for food, housing, transport, cattle production investments and schooling for themselves and their children. In other words, women with control over cattle were able to use their involvement in cattle production to gain social and economic security and independence both in the present and for the future. As such, the cattle provided them with a stronger position from which to negotiate in social and economic arenas.

Although women without control over their cattle were able to benefit in terms of material welfare and sometimes social position, they were not engaged on equal terms with men and could not negotiate independent social and economic relations through cattle production to the same extent, but were dependent on their husband or other relatives to mediate those relations. Thus, when looking at property relations as social relations (Macpherson 1978, Sikor and Lund 2009), and access to a resource as the ability to benefit from it (Ribot and Peluso 2003, Sikor and Lund 2009) in relation to the importance of women's relative equal control over resources (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b, 2003a, Jackson 2003) an intersectional analysis

(McCall 2005, Mollett and Faria 2013) helps us understand the choices and actions of differently situated livestock owners.

Both Rao (2008) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1990) state, when discussing property relations including ownership, that it matters what kind of resource or livestock one is talking about. Sanginga et al. (2013) have also identified the need to be species specific when discussing women's livestock ownership. Cattle are highly valued, both in economic and social terms, throughout Ghanzi and Botswana, and I have noted how women's control over cattle, knowledge about cattle and physical presence among cattle can in some cases lead to a sense of self-worth, respect, personhood and being a 'full person' – in a way that control over other livestock species does not. Importantly, though, what differs is the way in which a woman's control over cattle is accepted, valued or even made possible.

This study has focused on cattle, and it would be of great interest to explore how property relations and access to different livestock species might present other avenues of potential benefits for women owners. Livestock ownership discussions can thus be enriched by taking into consideration how different kinds of relations to particular non-human species matter for the ways in which established patterns of material and social relations are produced, reproduced and challenged.

Throughout the thesis, I have portrayed how the ways in which women are expected to, able to, willing to, and finally actually do engage in cattle production, as well as what it means when they do so, are interlinked with intersections of social categories of power relations. These categories can be seen to intersect in ways that position women in relation to cattle in the socio-symbolic realm in ways that shape the social context in which women own and farm cattle. Different kinds of relations to cattle are thus gendered in distinct ways at various intersections of ethnicity, race and class. In this way I point towards how analysis of access to resources and the ability to benefit from things (Ribot and Peluso 2003) can gain from an intersectional approach sensitive to local socio-symbolic associations of men and women with certain relations to specific livestock species.

Importantly, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, expectations of women's relations to cattle do not tell us what women actually do in material terms and I have shown that women do challenge these expectations in different ways. Particularly, I have also shown that it is not necessarily the women who were most closely associated with cattle production in the socio-symbolic realm for whom it was easiest to gain control over cattle. In fact, those without a pre-defined 'traditional' role within the heart of the cattle

production seemed to find it easier or more desirable to step in as cattle owners and managers with independent control over cattle.

## Commercialisation affecting women's involvement in cattle production

Women of different ages, ethnicities and class found that commercialisation of cattle production, together with the households' increased need for money, provided a strong motivation to engage independently and actively in cattle production in roles traditionally seen as male.

The commercialisation of cattle production was perceived among women in Ghanzi as an opportunity for women's increased involvement in cattle production. Although Botswana's beef trade with the EU also complicates cattle farming practices and presents considerable challenges for cattle farmers, women do retain and gain control over cattle in the context of commercial cattle production in Botswana.

Varying property relations to factors such as grazing land and technology (which in turn include a number of elements from fences to herd improvement), present different women with distinct opportunities and challenges in terms of market access and thus monetary benefits that may lead to increased material welfare and strengthened social positions. EU regulations of traceability, BMC's demand for heavy calves, and a perceived lack of selling opportunities create challenges that affect women across ethnicities and class. Poor access to the market can seriously hamper women's opportunities to benefit from their cattle ownership in monetary terms – and the possibility to sell cattle, as I have shown, is an important way to benefit from cattle assets for women with different herd size, land tenure, ethnicity and relations to cattle.

Women cattle owners in Ghanzi can be more or less oriented towards subsistence or commercial cattle production, whether they have cattle on fenced, privately held grazing land or non-fenced communal grazing land. The possibility – not the willingness – to engage in commercial production depends to different extents on the possibility to fence grazing land, herd size, and on the possibilities to physically transport the cattle to the buyer. Rather than being a 'commercial farmer' or a 'subsistent farmer', commercial and subsistence farming is thus something that people do. Strategies might thus change over time or be combined, as Peters (2013) suggests.

In order to further explore the gender dynamics of changes in rural areas in societies where livestock production of a certain species becomes increasingly commercial, not only do we need to be sensitive to the various



ways that longstanding values intermingle with commercial values (Rankin 2003) at intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class, but we should also be attentive to what types of assumptions of values and preferred practices are linked to different groups of farmers.

Although studies have shown how common assumptions associated with those groups of farmers labelled as ‘commercial’, ‘communal’ or ‘subsistence’ are not always accurate, the terms still linger in policy and scholarly work. As such, there is reason to emphasise that analysis of rural developments could gain from being open to new social categories and refrain from accepting too readily those longstanding social categories that have been presented to us from previous literature. Terms used as binaries, such as ‘communal’ and ‘commercial’, or ‘subsistence’ and ‘commercial’, and perhaps even ‘pastoralism’ and ‘ranching’ in some contexts, could be glossing over old or new inequalities at times, and if explored in detail in the context of contemporary and future rural developments, might reveal exciting intricacies and new tools with which to think.

While naturalising or depoliticising inequalities linked to property relations to grazing land and cattle risk to perpetuate such differences, recognising the claims to cattle and cattle markets that women make in the face of various challenges could be a step towards further understanding local rural developments. In the face of inequalities, women in Ghanzi at different intersections of gender, ethnicity, race and class as well as marital status saw the commercialisation of cattle farming as an opportunity for increased material welfare and a stronger social position. The availability of grants and loans was a recurring theme brought up in discussion about reasons for how women had developed increased control over cattle. Also, increased focus on formalised transactions implementing *de jure* ownership via regulations assuring that only the person holding the branding certificate could sell the animals with that particular brand burnt onto its hind thigh might facilitate control over cattle for those in otherwise subordinate positions.

The women in this study entered agriculture at the intersection of two male domains: cattle and commercial production. Further, they made claims to the formal market and even worked towards making global beef export market part of their local cattle market. While Arora-Jonsson (2013) shows how women create their own local market to escape the formal market, there are the women in Ghanzi of different ethnicity and class who instead want stronger connection to the global beef trade.

Women’s ability to engage in new ways in cattle production – and perhaps even to imagine such possibilities – has been facilitated by

government efforts to further gender equality, rural entrepreneurship and effective beef production, connected to the possibility to sell cattle. Government efforts to increase gender equality, as well as the availability of loans, have made it possible for those with no or little access to capital to start or enhance their cattle operation. The legal possibility for women to own cattle and to manage loans and land tenure, together with the regulations stemming from the EU that demand traceability and thereby strengthen the cattle owners' control over sales with the help of brands, have given some women the possibility to renegotiate their material welfare and social position in society. Because of such factors, some women have been able to challenge established gender relations that had earlier, as Hovorka (2012) shows, privileged men and cattle and simultaneously prescribed women to a relationship with small livestock such as chickens. Further, they have done so by becoming engaged themselves in privileged and valued cattle production.

Women's control over cattle was perceived in many instances as being enabled by, as well as enabling, new gender relations. In some cases, while a perception of changing gender relations in society encouraged women to obtain control over cattle, having their own cattle made a difference in their own specific gender relations. In contrast to many places where women's access and control over livestock and livestock assets has been shown to decline with increased commercial activity (Dahl 1987, Talle 1988, Hodgson 1999a, Wangui 2008, Kristjanson et al. 2010, Njuki and Sanginga 2013b), this is not the case for many of the women I met in Ghanzi District.

Nevertheless, how widespread women's increased involvement in cattle production in Botswana and elsewhere might be, and how it might continue to affect gender relations at large, are topics for future investigation. Whether women's changing property relations to cattle is a wider phenomenon in Botswana and elsewhere is a matter for future research. What is clear is that it can and does happen through the actions of women in different contexts and situations.

Thus far, the increase in women with independent ownership and control over cattle experienced both by women and men in Ghanzi does not seem to have led to a 'feminisation' or devaluation of cattle production, as has been documented elsewhere when women enter a male-dominated sphere (cf. Acker 2004). Although mining is today Botswana's most important sector economically, cattle production is still a cultural and social stronghold.

Finally, one might ponder the possibilities of cattle in relation to other livestock such as goats, sheep and chickens for rural development in

Southern Africa and elsewhere where cattle have had paramount historical importance in political, economic and social relations. Culturally valued projects (Ortner 2001, 2006) around cattle are gendered, and the way that cattle projects are gendered is in some instances changing in Ghanzi. Although it cannot be denied that women in certain places might be more likely to keep control over livestock species that are in the socio-symbolic realm associated with women – or at least not with men – it may be worth exploring the effects of supporting women to gain control of whatever key species define social relations in particular societies.

Whether the gendered character of culturally valued livestock projects can change more broadly with women's increased involvement and strengthened property relations would constitute an avenue for further exploration for gender scholars and practitioners of rural development. There is a chance, nevertheless, that women's cattle ownership in Ghanzi is linked to a process of rebranding gender relations in Botswana.



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